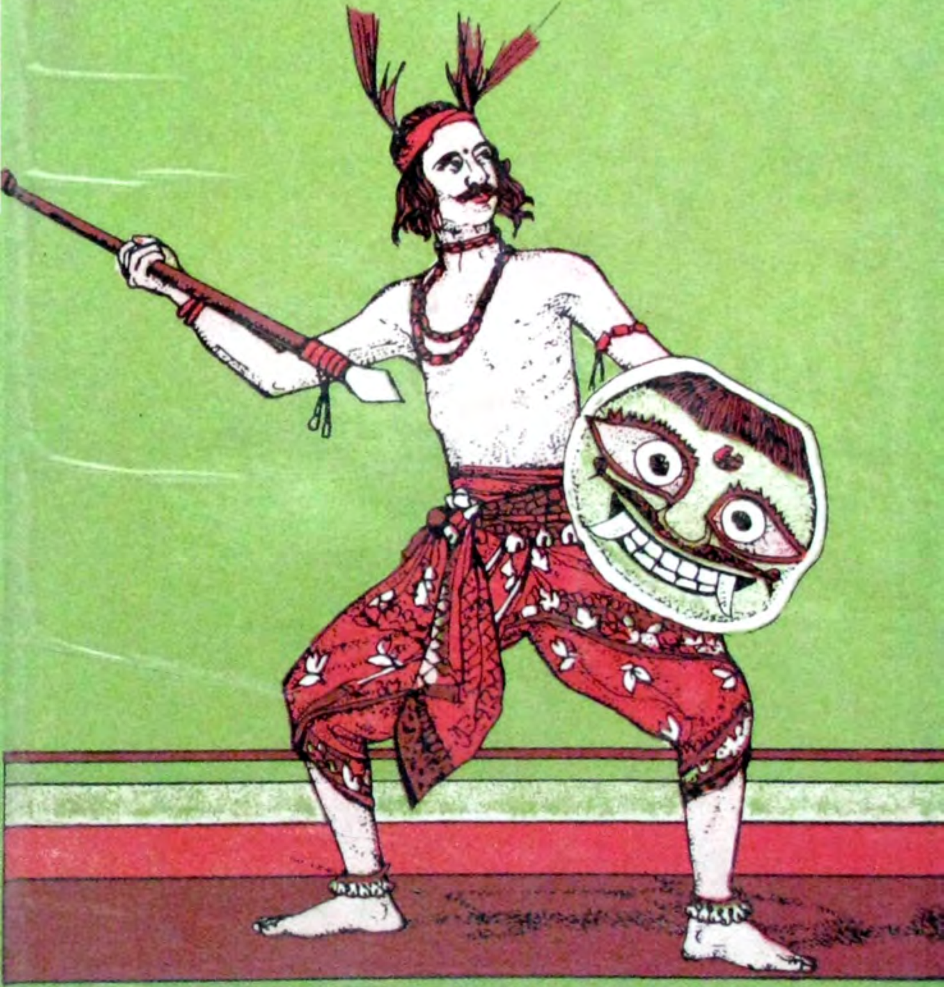
# MAYURBHANJ CHHOW DANCE
## ORIGIN GROWTH & GRAMMAR



Radha Mohan Mohanty

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# MAYURBHANJA CHHOW DANCE
## Origin, Growth, Grammar

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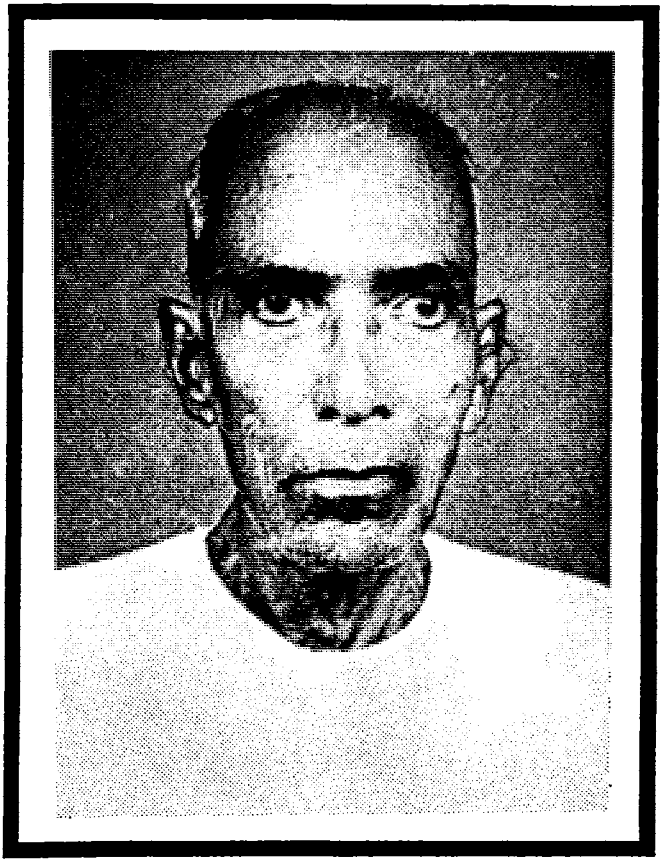

RADHAMOHAN MOHANTY
(1912 – 1993)

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# *Acknowledgement*

*We are happy that the book, written in the year 1976, the publication of which was delayed for various reasons is now published. The publication would have been further delayed had Prof. J. M. Mohanty not taken keen interest in the matter. He took the pains to go through the manuscript and edited the same to bring it to its present shape. We are deeply indebted to him for his kind cooperation*

*Late Major Supravat Majumadar of Baripada, a childhood friend of the author, had helped the author to compile the book. We remember his contribution with deep gratitude.*

*We think this is a seminal book on Chhow and first of its type as the accounts has been written from the first hand experience of a person who was deeply involved in the evolution of chhow as a dance-form at Baripada. We would be happy and consider our labours rewarded if the book be of help to persons interested in Chhow.*

*We are also thankful to Sri Ramakanta Mishra of Orissa Writers' Co-operative Society Ltd. Bhubaneswar and Sri Laxminarayan Das of Baripada who took great interest in publication of this book and helped us in various ways.*

***Publisher***

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# PREFACE

During the early thirties, after leaving school, I had been attracted to the Chhow Dance which during that period had enjoyed an immense popularity at Baripada, thanks to the patronage of the late Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanj Deo. Incidentally, during my early association with this rather esoteric art, I had contributed a dance composition *Matru Puja,* which I observe, is still being enacted after a lapse of over four decades.

A prolonged and detailed observation of the performance and the associate rites and ceremonies, led me to conclude that it was a recurrent annual climax of a socio-religious expression, but my attempts to fathom its origin and depth initially met with scant success as the leaders associated with the practice, preparation and presentation of the annual dance towards the end of the month of *Chaitra*, were not able to throw any cultural or religious light to illuminate its origin and back-ground, nor were they able to inform and connect it to the existing living culture of the people of Mayurbhanj.

But I persisted in my quest using whatever leisure time I got from my official duties, and managed at last to piece together a number of obscure cultural and religious links that go to build up the grand finale of the Chhow Dance on the last three days of the month of *Chaitra* ( March-April ).

This briefly is the thrust of the monograph I am now presenting to the public in the hope that it would be a handy mannual covering this area of culture in Mayurbhanj, and that it would induce researchers of greater calibre and equipment to do better and more extensive work.

It is not difficult to understand why this beautiful art form has not so far attained the popularity it intrinsically deserves. For one thing, the *Ostads* or the *Gurus*, were confined to the sphere of the actual performance of this dance, and were mostly being without any liberal education that would have enabled them to seek its sources in the cultural milieu of the land. For another, those few who had a wider glimpse and being faithful to their attitude to traditional knowledge preferred not to share their knowledge with the public.

The old princely State of Mayurbhanj situated on the North of Orissa covers an area of about 4,500 sq. miles of which about half comprises of hills, some of which are in the region of 3500 feet, and extensive jungle tracts inhabited by a large majority of Adivasi tribes. On the north, it borders with the Midnapur district (of West Bengal)

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and Singhbhum district (of Bihar); on the south Balasore district and the old princely State of Nilagiri ( now a part of Balasore district ); on the east are the districts of Midnapur and Balasore and on the west, old princely State of Keonjhar-Bhanja-Bhumi and a portion of Singhbhum. Thus, this land is fully exposed to the cultural currents and cross currents originating from the neighbouring areas of West Bengal and Bihar which were and still are ethnically and culturally allied to Mayurbhanj. Incidentally, this process was by no means a one-way traffic, because anciently the area popularly known as 'Kolhan' of Singhbhum was a part of Mayurbhanj, and some scholars, notably Mr. J. F. Hewitt, one time Commissioner of the Chhotnagpur Division, as well as Hunter and others are of the opinion that the area of Tamluk was once ruled by Bhanja kings and was a part of Orissa, leaving unmistakable cultural traits in the land.

Like all art forms in India, the origin of the Chhow may be traced to the popular religious beliefs and practices prevalent in the area of Chhotnagpur plateau, where Hindu, Buddhist and tribal culture freely intermingled to produce a syncretic culture of which the Chhow is one expression. Because of geographical contiguity the Chhow Dance is mostly confined to the Chhotnagpur plateau comprising of Purulia and Midnapur districts of West Bengal, Singhbhum, Dhalbhum, Birbhum, Saraikela and Kharswan of Bihar, and Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Nilagiri, Bonai, Talcher and other *Garjat* areas of Orissa.

I may be permitted to add here that I did not plunge into the subject in haste, or in a spirit of bravado. Nor did I accept apparently informed opinions at their face value, Instead I had gone on a 'voyage of discovery' for three decades, studying, discussing and cogitating, before being satisfied that what I have to say, represents what I consider to be the truth about this ancient art as opposed to hearsay. I thank all the authors whose works I have consulted. I also thank many knowledgeable and wise people whose views and opinions I valued most. My ambition had been to be as faithful and authentic as possible and if there are errors, lacunae and lapses in the text the responsibility is wholly mine. The pages that follow seek to elaborate in detail, in the belief that a culture cannot be hoarded and that it cannot be the private possession of any community or nation and it is wise to give a culture away so that it can be retained at the end.

***Radhamohan Mohanty***

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# CHAPTER ONE

# THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND

## SHAIVISM

Any enquiry would reveal a wide-spread practice of Shaivism in this area as this cult was widely followed in India even prior to the Christian era. As pointed out by Nagendra Nath Basu, the early Bhanja kings of Mayurbhanj were devotees of the Shaiva cult as they are described in copper plate inscriptions as *Maha Shaivas.* Also as Dr K.C. Panigrahi pointed out the extant copper plate inscriptions of the Bhanja kings of Khiching always began with an invocation to Shiva. Being under royal patronage, the Shaiva cult was practised in various forms and names, and the land is studded with Shiva temples and shrines. According to the Census Report of Mayurbhanj, 1931, Vol. I. ( P. 129 ) there are 91 temples dedicated to Shiva, 21 to Vishnu and a few shrines to Durga and Chandi. Architecturally, some of these temples are beautiful, the most important being the temple of Chandrasekhar, situated at Khiching, which flourished between 10th and 16th century as the old capital of Mayurbhanj. It would not be out of place here to mention that in the ruins of Khiching was found the famous statue of Nataraja, the Dancing Shiva ( now kept in the Calcutta Museum ), which though unfortunately somewhat mutilated, is one of the finest of its type. Its face has the serenity of *yogamagna* stance in contrast to the *rudra* or *bhayānaka* Dancing Shivas found elsewhere in India, and as Swami Prajnyananda pointed out, "free from the conflict of the senses, the body pliable and rounded, engaged in the slow majestic cadence of the Cosmic Dance".

Similarly, a recent discovery at the little known village of Asanpat in Keonjhar district, not far from Khiching, is the statue of Shiva with 8 arms in the *tandava* dance. At the base of this statue which is a master piece of the sculptor's art, is an inscription in Bramhi script which can not be fully deciphered, but the calligraphy indicates that the statue was executed after the Kushans and before the rise of the Imperial Guptas.

The discovery of these fine Nataraja figures in these areas is an indication that Shaivism was a live religious tradition in Mayurbhanj and one can easily surmise the vital influence it must have had in the evolution as well as on the final form of the Chhow Dance of Mayurbhanj.

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**BUDDHISM**

After the destruction of Nalanda and Vikramasila by the Muslims the Buddhist monks had sought to keep their religion alive by seeking sanctuary in the plains of Orissa. But subsequently faced with the persecution by the Oriya kings, notably Purusottam Deva and Prataprudra Deva, the Buddhists moved to the densely forested and mountainous areas of the land and there continued to practise their religion in a disguised manner and in the process assimilated Shiva and other non-Buddhist gods and goddesses.

It should be remembered that Tantrik god and goddess, Bhairava and Bhairavi, according to George Weston Briggs, were assimilated into popular Buddhist religion during the 10th - 11th century.

This assimilation was accomplished with comparative ease because of striking similarities between the popular images of Shiva and Buddha. Both had forsaken the world. Both were mahāyogis. Both were above worldly and mundane desires and had taken to the life of a homeless wandering ascetic. Both systems had Tantric overtones and were addressed directly to the common masses and the outcastes.

For a considerable period thereafter, the predominant religion of the hill areas of Orissa had been this form of covert or concealed Budhism. For the purpose of observing the ceremonies these Buddhist priests invented new names for their gods, created fresh forms of worship and composed their appropriate *mantras*, and in these new masks and guises attempted to perpetuate their faith. Another compelling reason for this camouflaged observance of the faith was that the decayed Buddhism had no standing in the Hindu society and the followers were looked down upon as outcastes. Hence by this obvious deception they sought and probably obtained social and religious recognition. It should be observed that Buddhism in these forms lingered in these areas for centuries and even now traces can still be discovered in the mythology and cosmography of the various obscure local sects, such as the *Alekhas*. Few telling lines to illustrate our point culled from their scripture *Mālikā* are produced below:

> In the *Kaliyuga* the devotees are passing their lives in disguise, though they have not yet seen the form of the incarnation of Buddha, in the hope that the *Gadi* (Seat) of the *Sunya* will be established in the province of Bihar and there the Lord Alekha will, through his creative power, as-

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sume the form of a human being in the incarnation of Buddha for the good of his devotees who will thus attain emancipation". ( translated )

Further, as has been established by scholars, the famous *Pancha Sakhās* (Five comrades ) of 16th century that is, Achyutananda Das, Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, Ananta Das and Yoshobanta Das, whose songs, bhajans and sayings are the household assets in Orissa, had only outwardly accepted the cult of Shri Chaitanya, being convinced Buddhists of the Mahajan School believing in *Sunyabad*, a typical concept of Buddhist faith. Examples from their *Bramhānda Bhugol* and Sunya *Purāna* which extol *Sunya* (Void), the origin of all creation, are reproduced below:

> In the beginning there were not Bramha, Vishnu, Shiva. The Vedas were also not there. My form was formless void. Thus passed paeons and the Supreme Void came into being. From there rose *Pranava*, which is the other name of *Omkār* the Monosyllabic Cosmic Call. (translated)
>
> The miraculous birth is at will and the Void *Sunya* arose from Void. Then came sound not caused by friction, *anahat*, not audible to the human ear. From the sound was revealed knowledge. It descended from the Void, merged with the air, and gathered in Formless. The manifest sound was Void, the Void was First Cause, Eternal without form. (translated)

Also it is stated by Padmashri Lakhmi Narayan Sahu that as many as 10,000 Buddhist priests were to be found in the *Garjat* areas of Orissa. Consequently it is not surprising that Buddhistic influence could be traced in Mayurbhanj. Thus at Itmundi, in the areas of Khiching, there is a statue of *Abalokiteswara*, and a *Stupa*, and Buddhist gods can be seen at Barasahi, in *Athara Deula* (Eighteen Temples), in the impregnable Similipal Hills, as well as in the old stone fortress at Joshipur. In addition there are the images of *Dharma Thākura* and Goddess *Sitalā*, obviously Buddhistic, and widely venerated. There also exists a varied and wide literature built round this form of Buddhism. For example, the *Sunya Puran*, the *Dharma Mangal* and several other Oriya manuscripts have been located in areas adjacent to Barasahi and Khiching. Dinesh Chandra Sen also quotes in his typical selections from old Bengalee literature, a version of the Gopichand songs in a mixed Oriya-Bengalee dialect, from the Yogis of Mayurbhanj.

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Further, N.N. Basu, in his *Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj* says inter-alia, that in the 17th century a Tibetan pilgrim Budhagupta Natha visited the Hari Bhanj Chaitya at Barasahi, near Haripur, the then capital of the Bhanja kings of Mayurbhanj, and learnt many esoteric truth from the lips of a great *dharma pandit* there as well as from a learned *upāsikā* of the name of Hitagarbhaghana. He also says that there is enough evidence to suggest that the Bathuris or Bauris who profess Hinduism at present were originally of Buddhist persuasion and that the name Baripada could well have been a corruption of the name Bauripada, the home of the Bauris or Bathuris.

It is mentioned by Dinesh Chandra Sen in *Banga Bhasa O Sahitya* (P.47) that Ramai Pandit was the founder of the system of *Dharma Puja Padhati* which was an alternate mode of Buddhistic worship which had a perceptible influence in Mayurbhanj. This view is also confirmed by N.N. Bose in his book *Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa* (P.138-149).

The Tibetan pilgrim Budhagupta Natha who visited Haripur, in 17th century, found Buddhism still being followed in this land. The pervasive hold of Buddhism in the contiguous areas of central India even at an earlier period is testified by the following quotation from the *History and Culture of Indian People,* Vol-V which also illustrates the celebration of a spring-festival allied or akin to the Chaitra-Parva celebrations in Mayurbhanj-Chhotnagpur complex.

> To what extent pomp and ceremony become a part of Buddhism is indicated by the description of the spring-time festival in seven verses of the *To Proham Inscription* of Yoga-Varman VII (of Kamboja, in 11th to 12th Century AD). It was celebrated every year from 8th to 15th day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra. Dancing by girls formed an important part of the ceremony and offerings were made to the three *gurus*, thousand devotees and 619 divinities while 1000 learned persons such as *brahmins* and *bhikshus* were entertained. *Bhagaban* and *Bhagabati* together with the Gods *Vira, Sakti* and others were to make the *Pradakshina* (circumbilatioon).

Significantly enough, at Barasahi, on the occasion of the Buddha Purnima, in the month of Vaisākha, which is a sacred month of the Buddhists, the *Chaitra Parva festival* is celebrated by the *bhaktas* instead of in the month of Chaitra. Incidentally it may be noticed that to

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the opinions held by the popular Hindu orthodoxy that Buddhism had been driven out from the land of its birth by Shankaracharya, is basically unfounded. The catholic outlook of a Hindu, even at present, prompts him to visit the Budh-Gaya temples and give *dakhina* when he visits Gaya for performing rites for the ancestors. Similarly the claim of the Buddhists that the prosetylising or missionary activities of Ashok in favour of the Buddhism has resulted in the suppression of the *Sanatan Dharma* is equally untenable. On the contrary, Shankara and his followers over the centuries were deeply influenced by Buddhism. Indeed Indian philosophy owes much of its depth and interest to Buddhism and to its scholars, as has been handsomely acknowledged by Das Gupta in the following address:

> I yield to none in my profound respect for the great teacher Shankara, but a careful analysis of his writings demonstrates indisputably that he largely borrowed his doctrine, his phraseology, his dialecties, and his method of approach from Buddhism. Not only Shankara but many of his followers like Sriharsa Anandayana and others who have constructed the Vedanta into a national system of Philosophy deliberately followed the foot-prints of Nagarjuna and other Buddhist writers.

But it may be pointed out that the Hindu systems of philosophy would have lost much of their depth, interest and value, if they would not have assimilated ideas from Buddhism and would not have been forced to take an independent stand by its side.

Thus having reviewed the second strand in the evolution of Chhow, we shall proceed to examine yet another, i.e., autochthonous culture and its contribution to Chhow.

## INDIGENOUS CONTRIBUTION

As this art form had taken shape within a predominantly Adivasi milieu by a synthesis of Shaiva, Buddhist, Vaishnava and other traditions, it is only to be expected that the *Chaitra Parva* would incorporate some of the socio-religious aspects of the indigenous culture. This inference is confirmed when it is remembered that the Santals observe the *Chaitra Parva* and *Charak Pujā* ( hook swinging ) of the Hindus in Mayurbhanj under the name of *Pāta-Parva* in the tribal dialect. It is claimed in this connection that the *Pata Parva* of Bamanghaty is as celebrated as the Chhow of Sareikella, the proverb being, *Saraikellar*

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*Nāta Bāmanghātir Pata* (Saraikellar's Nata and Bamanghati's Pata). The meaning of the word *Pata* is stated to be a festival in honour of Mahadeva. This conception of *Pata* is also current among the non-Adivasis of Mayurbhanj as when they foregather to offer worship and prayer on the occasion of the *Kantā* (Hook) *Pata*, the *Niān* (Fire) *Pata* and the *Jhulā* (Swing) *Pata* when the bhaktas swing with their heads over a blazing fire while being suspended from their feet, and the *Udā (Hook swinging) Pata*. Further they like their non-Adivasi neighbours also observe the fasts and feasts and celebrate by singing and dancing, the festivals marking the change of season. They go in processions in celebration of the *Chaitra Parva* as is their custom for all festivals, with appropriate music and dancing symbolically bidding farewell to the spring, the prince of the seasons as well as welcoming the summer, heralding annual cultivation.

Thus an appreciable volume of Adivasi musical forms as well dance steps has found its way into the Chhow dances (*Devajāni, Kirāt - Arjuna, Kelā-keluni and Mātru Puja* etc). Further, the forest dwellers of the Manbhum district of West Bengal have two age-old themes in their Chhow, the destruction of the demon brothers Samhu and Nisambhu and the killing of Mahisasura (the Buffalo Demon) by the goddess Durga. Both the themes are superbly enacted and evoke a tremendous emotional response from the crowd. It is no mere coincidence that both the themes (with some modifications ) have long been incorporated in the Mayurbhanj Chhow even to the extent of having similar choreography in the *Sambhu-Nisambhu* duet in the *Dakhin Sāhi* and *Mahisāsura Mardini group* number of *Uttar Sahi.*

According to Charulal Mukherjee they celebrate in addition, to mention only a few, the *Gamhā* in the month of *Srāvan* (August) with new clothes with dancing as well as grooming, painting and anointing the horns of cows; the *Karam Nata* in August-September when the early paddy is harvested specially by the Kurmis and Bhumijas; and the *Bandan*, a form of cow worship during Dipavali when they perform the popular *Kāthi Nata* at which the dancers hold stout sticks and dance to the rhythm of the beats of the *Kathi* (stick); and the *Makar* in the month of January. The last one is by far the most important of their festivals, corresponding to the Christmas of the Chirstians, the Pongal of the South Indians and the Puja in Bengal and Orissa. Similarly they have another important festival called *Sāhi Puja* which is the flower festival held in April when the Sāl trees are in blossom and when sacrifices of goats to Ganesh and rams to Brahma are offered in addition to singing

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and dancing. Incidentaly the most astonishing phenomenon to be noticed is the worship of goddess Chāmundā at Khiching, where people irrespective of caste, creed or ethnic origin assemble to offer worship to the deity- a casteless worship unique in India.

The supreme diety in the Santal cosmology is the *Dharma*, who in the words of Shri Nabin Majhi, the Headmaster of Chamaradahani, Murada, is the creator of the universe, but is formless or Nirākār, obviously a transference of the Buddist concept.

To round off the illustrations it should be remembered that the Car Festival which according to Hutton (*Castes in India*, P.26) was originally an Adivasi festival and which probably had an element of fertility cult and has been incorporated in the Hindu practice, is celebrated with equal enthusiasim by all the people of Mayurbhanj.

To conclude the discourse, Shiva is worshipped by the Adivasis as their primary God apparently for the important reason that Bana Raja, one of the most powerful and popular of the Adivasi kings of the area was himself an ardent follower of Shiva, and this link unmistakably binds the Adivasi culture to the Chhow. It may be added further, Shiva of whom Bana Rājā was a devotee and worshipper, was in popular conception the Natarāj., the King of Dance. Not only was he the creator and originator of dance, but also the origin of the six primary melodies was attributed to his five mouths and one to his consort, i.e., *Shree, Basanta, Vairava, Pancham* and *Megha* from his five mouths and *Nata Nārāyana* from Parvati. The story does not end here. In addition to these six primary rāgas, Shiva along with his consort is credited with the introduction of the Pinaka, the one string bow, which may well have been the earliest musical instrument, which was evolved by the Adivasis of this area, and is most probably the prototype of the *kendarā* which is still in extensive use among the Adivasis of Mayurbhanj. This story may therefore help us to appreciate why Shiva and Parvati are deemed to have been the primary cosmic instructors of music and dance and are still venerated as such. In this aspect Shiva is more a God of the Adivasis than any other group. The legend of the *Kirata-Arjuna* episode recorded in the *Mahabharat* lends credence to this point of view and the same episode constitutes one of the important dance- themes in the Chhow repertory. It is in the fitness of things, therefore, that the Adivasi culture with emphasis on singing and dancing is linked with the Chhow Dance in particular, and to Indian music and dancing in general. The following quotation from Will Durant illustrates the point vividly–

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With music, song and dance combined, the Savage created for us the drama and the opera. For the primitive dance was frequently devoted to mimicry, it imitated most simply, the movements of animals and men as passed to the mimetic performance of actions and events. What seems us not to be forms of play were probably serious matters to early men, they danced not merely to express themselves, but to offer suggestions to nature or gods, for example, the primitive incitation to abundant reproduction was accomplished chiefly through the hypnotism of the dance.

In like manner a thousand forms of pantomine described events significant to the history of the tribe on actions important in the individual's life. When rhythm disappeared from these performances, the dance passed into the drama and one of the greatest of art-forms was born. In these ways precivilised men created the forms and basis of civilisation. We owe almost everything to the Savage as a fortunate youth inherits the means to culture , security and ease through the long toil of an unlettered ancestry. (*Story of Civilisation: Our Oriental Heritage*)

It is significant in this connection to recall that the musical instruments used during the Chhow performances barring the European musical wind-instruments introduced later, are almost exclusively those used by the Adivasis, for example the local *Adivasi Dhumsā*, the side drum as percussion instrument for timing and rhythm, and *Mahuri*( a reeded form of Sahanai) for melody.

It is further refreshing to observe that the Adivasi worship is peculiarity free from idol veneration and it is just not a simple coincidence that the *Charak Puja, Chaitra Parva* etc. are equally devoid of any form of similar veneration.

**VAISHNAVISM**

Vaishnavism spread all over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during the 16th century. Prior to that the Hindu society had reached a low ebb culturally and politically. One has to appreciate and record that Sri Chaitanya and his followers rendered yeoman services to religion and society which under their inspiration became casteles in character and tradition and drew in all castes of the Hindus as well as of the Adivasis.

The Emperor Prataprudradev of Orissa had embraced this faith, and in the year 1510 AD Baidyanath Bhanja, the ruler of Mayurbhanj,

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had been initiated into Vaishnavism by Rasikananda Dev Goswami of Gopiballavapur, who was himself a leading disciple of Shri Chaitanya. It was this identical Baidyanath Bhanja who had built the present *Bara Jagannath* temple and the *Gundicha Mandir*, otherwise known as the Radha Mohan Mandir at Baripada. It would not be out of place to mention here that the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj and various other feudatory ruling chiefs of Orissa still consider themselves to be the devotees of the cult. The outsider is sometimes agreeably surprised at the strains of *kirtan* and *jhumur* music in the Chhow. But the simple explanation about the presence of *kirtan* melody is that some strains of *kirtan* which had been so widely diffused had almost imperceptibly been assimilated in the Chhow music, and in this process, surprisingly, the most intricate of the *tālas* of *kirtan* had been incorporated, i.e., the *dhāmar in Dandi*, the *choutāl* in *Natarāj*. (and *ranga bāja* alongwith the tunes as well.) The inclusion of the *jhumur* songs ( mostly of Radha-Krishna cult ) is easier to understand as it is the predominant folk music of the locality. Indeed, the tradition of composing as well as singing *kirtan* and *jhumur* songs was an established accomplishment of the princely family of Mayurbhanj. To take only two examples, Chhotrai Saheb Brundaban Chandra Bhanj, younger brother of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanj, was a reputed composer of *kirtan* and was himself a singer of no mean talent . His grandson late Lal Saheb Sarat Chandra Bhanj, cousin of late Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanj, was the author of a book of *jhumur* songs of sufficiently high quality as to deserve official felicitation from the State Government.

Nor is this the end of the story. The Chhow comprises of many themes illustrative of the Radha-Krishna Leela which, like the Tamudia Krishna, has not in anyway lost its appeal even after massive repetitions and is incidentally the best of all the group numbers. The esoteric name Tamudiā is explained by the fact that the dance music (songs and tunes) employed in this dance is a variety of *jhumur* called *Tamudia jhumur* after the Tamudia Bhumijas who had originally migrated from the Tamad country, comprising Tamulk and adjoining areas. It may also be mentioned that in this theme the rules and conventions of the Sanskrit plays as well as Vaishnav kavyas are also observed, i.e., *Purva Raga*, the awakening of the first love in the human soul for God, *Biraha*, *Sakhā-sakhi Sambad*, *Sanketa Sthala* (one of which is the river side), and lastly the *Meelan* (union) illustrating some of the *Sātwika Bhābas*, i.e., *Stambha* (fixity), *Sweda* (sweating) *Romāncha* ( thrill ), *Swaraveda* (change of voice) , *Vepathu* (trembling) *Vaivarnya* (blushing), *Ashru* (shedding tears) and *Pralaya* (exhaustion). These are the emotions of the heroes and heroines in *Sringār Rasa*.

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It would not be out of place to recall here that dancing is an integral part of *kirtan*. Rai Ramananda, an important devotee of Shri Chaitanya in Orissa, had personally coached devadasis in dance and music for the performance of his *Jagannath Ballava Natak*. It is also claimed that Shri Chaitanya himself had, in an occasion, played the role of Radha, thus, setting the vogue for the social Jātrā (Radha Krishna Leela) which achieved a wide popularity in Bengal and Orissa, and obviously Mayurbhanj did not escape its influence. In fact after the acceptance of Vaishnavism by the king of Mayurbhanj it was given a tremendous fillip of popular acceptance as the religion of the Maharaja, a sort of State religion.

It now remains briefly to review a few more strands, i.e., the language, sculpture, architecture and such other auxiliaries etc.

### THE AUXILIARIES

A critical examination of the remains of the temples and the large number of statues and images found amid the ruins of Khiching, has revealed an astonishing high degree of excellence achieved both in the art of temple-building and more so in the art of executing statues. According to some, these examples of the Mayurbhanj School of the sculptor's art excel in beauty, poise, maturity and finish in comparison to others found at other temples of Orissa. The statues at Khiching indicate a fusion or synthesis of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions,. Naturally enough this synergetic tradition is echoed in the art form of the Chhow.

Because of the location of Mayurbhanj as the bridge between Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Oriya language of this area has been considerably influenced by the languages of contiguous districts of Singhbhum, and more so of Midnapur with which Mayurbhanj had a long history of contacts– commercial, economic, social and matrimonial as well as political. The most living product of these intense contacts, for our purposes, is the almost trilingual jhumur music and there is nothing much to be surprised about such a development. Almost till the Islamic conquest the vast stretch of land on the north of the Vindhyas, constituting the bulk of northern India, comprising of Saraswata, Kanyakubja, Mithila, Gaur and Utkala, had gone by the generic name of 'Pancha-Gaura'. Although it was in the nature of a geographical expression, periodically the most powerful rulers of this region were invested with the title 'Pancha Gaudeshwara' as an honorific form of address. Although the political nexus was tenuous or largely non-existent, the cultural exchanges were free and regular, and are enshrined in Oriya as well as in Bengali, Maithili and Hindi languages. It is therefore to be expected that a vari-

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ety of trilingualism would evolve in Mayurbhanj which had become a junction for the cultural currents, where the three cultural streams from Orissa, Bengal and Mithila co-mingled. It would not be out of place to mention here that the nine languages belonging to Indo-Aryan family viz, Oriya, Bengali, Hindustani, Gujrati, Kachhi, Marwari, Marhatti, Punjabi and Nepali are spoken in Mayurbhanj, including tribal languages. Readers desirous of knowing more about the subject are recommended to consult Bengal District Gazetteer ( Midnapur and Balasore) by L.S.S. O'Malle, 1907 and 1911 respectively, and the 'Linguistic Survey of India' vol.v, by Dr. Grierson.

No particular mention has been made of such other strands as the *tantra, yoga* and the sun-worship. And yet the *Bhakti* discipline and regimen in which caste taboos are almost totally absent recall features of the *yoga* and *tantra*.

The traditional dance form is to a large extent a stylised form of sun-worship specially the *Nabagraha* dance, which is brought to a close with the first streak of dawn, which signals the end of all Chaitra Parva celebrations by moblising and ushering in of the New Year after bidding farewell to the old. A part of the dance, musical chanting of the new almanac (*Panjikā*) which forecasts the happy events and the woes of the New Year, are solemnly noted. Incidentally, the curtain for this dance rises on a stage worship of the *Nabagrahas* and the Sun prior to performing of the dance. It has been pointed out how the Sun-worship is an old and ancient practice in Eastern India undertaken in the hope of large yield in agriculture, and the many temples in Orissa, particularly Konark and Khiching, bear testimony to the vigour of the cult. The relevance of the cult of Sun-worship to the Chaitra Parva and the Chhow (particularly the *Nabagraha* dance) which are apparently Shaiva in character can be understood if it is remembered that according to the *Linga Purana* (*Uttar Bhag*, 11th Chapter) the Sun-God is considered to be a manifestation of one of the many aspects of Shiva.

Against the background of the present pressing need of cultural integration it may be pointed out with pride that the problem had been faced by our forebearers in Mayurbhanj who had found the answer in the casteless or creedless Chaitra Parva celebration in which all elements of society freely and enthusiastically particip--- Religion is the binding link, and unites people as nothing else can. The Chaitra Parva celebrations and the Chhow dance are the shinning examples.

These then are the strands, many and varied, of the mixed and composite art of Chhow, illustrating the truth of the saying that the story of the land is closely connected with its art and culture from cradle to the grave-yard.

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# CHAPTER TWO

# THE CHHOW

Having briefly reviewed the socio-religious and cultural aspects of Chhow, we now proceed to discuss the Chhow in greater detail upon its origin, growth, the underlying principles of the dance, and its traditional presentation as offered by the artists of Mayurbhanj. The people of this state and particularly of this district, are not strangers to this festival. The echo of its music has also crossed the boundaries of the state and reached the lovers of art throughout the country and abroad. The time is now ripe to complete a grammar of Chhow embodying a comprehensive review of its main aspects and facets.

## ORIGIN

One school is of opinion that this dance has evolved in cantonments (*Chhāuni)* as practised by the soldiers of Mayurbhanj. A little scrutiny would indicate that this view had been arrived at a trifle too hastily, apparently from the similar sound of the two words *Chhow* and *Chhauni.* Another view is that the word Chhow is derived from such words as *Chhabi* (picturesque), *Chhai* or *Chhatak* (clowning) and *Chhāyā* (mask or shadow),. A deeper investigation unmistakably goes to show that far from being of a martial origin, it is a type of dance that has evolved over the centuries, forming a part of the socio-religious celebrations held during the spring, annually terminating around mid-April, the grand-finale in Mayurbhanj, coming off on the last day of *Chaitra* (Solar month) just before the *Mahā Vishuba Sankrānti* (First *Vaisākha*).

The Chaitra Parva celebrations commonly known as Chhow Dance in Mayurbhanj, are in tune with similar celebrations in different parts of the state as well as the adjoining states of Bihar, West Bengal and some other regions of India. Different scholars have attempted to trace the origin of these celebrations but they have not been able to arrive at a consensus,. The weight of evidence goes to indicate that although the festival marks the end of spring and the beginning of the agriculture season, variations in the pattern of celebrations arise out of local conditions, and different cultural milieu of different regions, affording one more example of unity in diversity.

It is no coincidence that celebration of the spring festival in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) is an all India phenomenon, the cardinal features of the celebrations being dancing and singing by boys and

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girls. Youths and maidens, clad in colourful and bright clothes, and in garlands of roses, *champak*, jasmine and *palāsha* and other fragrant and colourful flowers, join the celebrations. I can do no better than to quote from Todd in describing such a celebration at Udayapur :

> The last days of the spring are dedicated to Kamadeva, the God of Love. The scorching winds of the hot season are already beginning to blow, when flora drops her head and the God of love turns anchorite, yet the rose continues to blossom and affords the most fragrant Chaplits for the Rajasthanis amid all the heats of summer. Of the queen of flowers the Jasmine (*Chāmeli)* white and yellow, and the *Champak* that flowers in extreme heat, the ladies form garlands which they twine in their dark hair as bracelets or wear as pendant collars. There is no other city in the East where the adroration of the sex to Kamadeva is more fragrant than in the city of the rising sun (Udayapur). (*Annals of Antiquities of Rajsthan*, P.460).

He then concludes by quoting an apt hymn-"Hail God of the flower bow/Hail warrior with a fish on the banner/Hail powerful divinity, who causeth the firmness of the sage to forsake him /Glory to Madan the Kama, the god of the gods/By whom Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and Indra are filled with emotions of rapture". It is common knowledge that in the month of Chaitra the *Bāsanti Durga Puja* is celebrated with pomp and eclat at various shrines in and around the Mayurbhanj- Chotnagpur complex. These celebrations are indeed striking. The devotees, clad in appropriate festive clothes and bedecked with flowers, celebrate the *Pujā* singing and dancing often on stilts, balancing the *Ghata* (representing the deity) on the heads– a remarkable feat of balance and body-control. This spring celebration is called the *Madhu-Pārvan* and consequently another name of the month of Chaitra is the *Madhu Māsha.* This is not only a local celebration but also an ancient rite throughout India. It is during this month that the people belonging to the fisherman-caste in Orissa, gaily clad and in high spirits, celebrate the dance of the *Chaiti Ghodā* where the dancers imitate a horse by attaching to their chests the effigies of horses made of painted cloth and bambo strips. The celebrations connected with the *Ram Navami*, a major festivity all over the country, need be recalled at this point. This *Rām Navami* festival used to be celebrated in Baripada with a tremendous verve and eclat and the verbal duels between the two parties gaily bedecked and wearing masks to represent the heroes of the Ramayana were unfor-

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gettable experiences. Incidentally the *holi*-celebrations have an intimate significance for the Dakhina Sahi. The last theme of this Sahi, the very last, is the *holi*-dance, performed when the dawn breaks. It is a good and pleasing piece and the dancers go flat out in depicting the spirit of the Merry Spring festival. The end of this piece heralds the official closing of the Chhow, marked by a joyous demonstration of affection and pleasure including a liberal sprinkling of *Abhir Ranga* ( red powder and coloured water ) used in the actual celebration.

This Chaitra Parva is celebrated in the month of Chaitra, the month connected with the *Chitrā Nakhyatra* which according to tradition is considered auspicious for begetting children, or for votive acts for the welfare and prosperity of the generations born or unborn, or for promoting all kinds of celebrations and performances such as mimic plays and dances in gay, colourful and flower– bedecked costumes.

The Chhow of Mayurbhanj is thus a grand and fitting artistic salute to the Chaitra which is called *Shiva Chitra* and to the spring, demonstrating beyond doubt, the truth of its origin as a spring festival as recorded in the Mayurbhanj Gazette.

These functions in Mayurbhanj are by no means a celebration of an isolated festival. On the contrary it is allied to similar celebrations during the same month of Chaitra, all over Bengal, Bihar and some Garjāts of Orissa, where folks celebrate it, clad in gay and holiday clothes, wearing flowers, often in masks, singing and dancing. Such celebrations in those areas are sometimes named as *Gājan-Gambhirā, Charak Pujā , Bhaktā Nāta* etc.. and the participants are called *bhaktās*, a concept which has gone to form a subcaste or a surname in some areas of Mayurbhanj and Midnapur.

This celebration does not seem to be confined to the areas mentioned above. It is called *Maghanad* by the Gonds, and *Manda* in Chhotnagpur, *Chedul* and *Bagada* in Tamil and other places in the deep south. In south Orissa as well as in some ex-Garjats it is also known as the *Patuā nāta, Jhāmu nata* or the *Danda nata*. In concept, origin and in detail it is akin to Chhow to such an extent that it may be called the *Danda nata*. As has been mentioned by Rabi Narayana Das (The *Paursha* Sept. 1968) this Danda Nata is an ancient folk dance. The presiding deity of this dance is Shiva. The people of low social status, observe this festival with self- torture and mutilation and similar other rigid and strict regimen to please Shiva on the authority of Baneswar, who was the originator of the Danda Nata as well. It is also celebrated

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during the last days of the Chaitra, and festivities are brought to a close on the Maha Vishuva Sankranti day as the Chhow is similarly brought to a close on that very day. The number of bhaktās in each team is also 13. The name should not present any difficulty because the devotees of Shiva are often called *dandis* because they carry a staff or a cane as is done by the bhaktas of Baripada, and at night the popular participation takes the form of dances like the pātua (the bearer of ghata etc), savara-savarāni (the huntman and his mate), chadheiyā-chadheyāni (the bird-catcher or hunter and his mate). This bears an obvious resemblance to the Chhow. Danda Nata according to Pandit Binayak Mishra (*Oriya Sahityar Itihas*, P/207) is observed in Keonjhar which in a sense is an extension of Mayurbhanj, being a part of Bhanja Bhumi. There the presiding deity of the Raj family is Danda Devi, and the Danda Nata that is practised there is almost akin to the celebrations in Mayurbhanj. The same bhaktas holding the cane or danda go through celebrations reminiscent of the scenes at Baripada– the same burning of the incense, the same self-torture, the same ordeal over a bed of thorns or on burning embers by day. And after sunset the celebration transforms itself into a dance by gaily clad people accompanied by lively music. The emphasis is on the pantomime of the process of agriculture, with topical allusions, scenes and songs and dances and similar activities. These celebrations are locally called *Jātrās* or *Chhow Nata*. The cane or *danda* has an erotic significance in that if the spinal column of a man can be made as supple as the danda or cane he is deemed to have acquired an increment of virility. The rituals observed during the *ChaitraParva* celebration in Sarẹikella are also similar to that of *Danda Nata* rites of Orissa.

The reader is advised to refer to the relevant works (*Danda Nata* by Padmasri L.N. Sahu) for further details. Here we shall deal with some of the aspects of the dances in *Danda Nata* to demonstrate their kinship with the Chhow, in order to bear out our opinion, expressed earlier that the *Danda Nata* is the Chhow or the Chhow is the *Danda Nata*. A scrutiny of the *Danda Nata* with its rituals would reveal a similarity of the themes almost item by item, including the practice of wearing the masks and halo *Parvās*, as well as the music on the relationship of part to part determined by the relationship of the part to the whole. To give only a few illustrations :

(1) Both are Shaiva celebrations and in both the devotees are called *bhaktās*, 13 in number, under a *pata* (leader) bhakta.

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(2) One has to observe one of the best themes in the Chhow, the *Dandi* dance, in order to appreciate its similarity with the *Danda Nata* including the details of the turning, twisting, bending forward and backward and other movements of the *kamandalu* in the right.

(3) Further, aside from a few such dances as the *Dandi and Mahādeva,* in all the dances almost all the participants, both in the Chhow as well as in the *Danda Nata*, hold a bow in their left hand– the bow representing *Pināka*, the bow of Shiva, who is not only the presiding deity of both the dances but also the God of Destruction.

(4) *Savar and Savarāni,* characters of Danda Nata have their parallel in the various dance-themes of the Chhow, i.e., *Mātru Puja, Mayā Savari, Kirāt Arjuna, Devajāni and Sikāri etc.*

(5) The *Sāpuā Keļā-Keluni* and *Chadeyā-Chadeyāni* are common dramatic personae in the *Danda Nata* and the Chhow.

(6) Some of the best themes of the Chhow- *Dwāpar Leela, Asta Senāpati Jāmbeb* (solo dance Jāmbavana) where the Hanumān and the Jāmbavāna (bear) are portrayed, have their counter parts in the *Danda Nata* where the same Jambavana and Hanuman are depicted.

(7) The *Danda Nata* often depicts the war between the *Devas* and the *Dānavas*. The Chow is replete with such themes, i.e., *Mahisāsura Mardini, Surāsura (from Kalidas's Kumār Sambhabam) Vasmā Sura, Lalitā* and such others.

(8) Both the Chhow as well as the *Danda Nata* were in origin at least dumb-shows, the instrumental musical accompaniments being a later development, which later still was disfigured by pornographic songs. Thus both the dances in one sense were the first hesitant steps towards the art of dancing.

(9) Both the dances have been influenced by Buddhism. Buddhist influence on the Chhow dance has already been alluded to. It is not surprising that such Buddhist vestiges could be discerned in the *Danda Nata* because of the fact that a very large number (10,000, as stated earlier) of Buddhist had moved to the mountainous Garzat areas of Orissa and had quite understandably influenced the social and religious rites and institutions. Thus, as in Chhow one finds the flesh morti-

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fied, so also in *Danda Nata*, the devotees wail similarly on a bed of embers, or roll on a bed of thorns, or put themselves to such other selfmortification. To sum up, both the dances, the Chhow and the *Danda Nāta* are two facets of the same social reality, i.e., the evolution of a composite popular faith brought into being by Buddhism and Hinduism acting and reacting on each other.

(10) There is a theme in the *Danda Nata* enacted by a *fakir* pertaining to Islamic influence which also finds a faithful echo in the *Kāji-Pāji* of the Chhow about which more would be said in a later chapter. Suffice it is at this stage to mention that both the *Danda Nata* and the Chhow, in addition to indicating Hindu-Buddhist-Tantric influences were also not free from Muslim influences.

(11) In the Chaitra Parva celebrations at Baripada an important aspect is the role of the astrological forecast. The *Nabagraha dance* forecasts in detail the 'State of the Realm' with regard to the crop prospect, visitations of nature, the state of health of the Raja as well as of the community. These forecasts are made through songs, sung during the dance as had already been stated, after obtaining the details from the almanac. The *dāshi* accompanying the *bhaktās* also makes similar astrological forecasts. The *Danda Nata* has its exact parallel in the allied role of the astrologer (*bhabishyat kathan*). These forecasts are prefaced by a charming exhortation to the audience to take careful note of the likely events of the year as gleaned from the new almanac. The narrator in a general way indicates the future– the future events as inferred from the constellation of the planets from time to time, during the course of the incumbent year, i.e., if cholera is on the cards, it would be confined to the opposite side. Similarly floods or similar natural calamities would be confined to the opposite side. The following running translation of the 1976 composition would indicate the general tenor of the song:

> Pay attention ye folks to the reading and forecasts from the almanac for the year (beginning from mid-April). *Bruhaspati* (Jupitor) would rule as the King, *Rabi* (Sun) the Chief Minister, *Buddha* (Mercury) as *Purohita* (Chief Priest). Due to the maligning influence of *Rabi*, there would be an opthaline epidemic and other visitations in the country. Thus spoke Singha Samanta. *Sani* (Saturn) would be the astrologer and under his maligning influence there would be storms and floods in the coastal south. *Buddha*, the *Purohita*, would cause dissension, discord and strife be-

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tween habitations *(Sahi)*. *Āvarta* would be the dominant cloud and would cause damage to crops and would also cause a profusion of *Ketaki, Nāgeswar, Mallikā, Kunda and Mandāra* flowers. There would be general disturbances of peace in the land, except in Andhra and Utkala. Also India would acquire good name and fame, opines the almanac.

Welcome thou, the New Year, come with fresh blessings, and gladden the life of man world over (Keep the name of *Hari* always in the centre of the mind and soul).

(12) Also common to both the Chhow and the *Danda Nata* is the character of Jāmbabāna, the bear-headed warrior- cum- astrologer and the soothsayer, who had counselled Ramchandra on the strategy and tactics of the war against Ravana.

(13) The *Ghata* embodying Kali is venerated in the Chhow as well as in *Danda Nata.*

(14) The *Holo* (Parva) is also a common feature, symbolising Kali, the consort of Shiva, or one of her associates of the name of *Ugra parva* from which apparently the word *parva* meaning the holo has been obtained. Further, the original custom, now in abeyance at Baripada, but still practised in countryside, was that the dance is opened by depicting Shiva in a suitable mask and by his concert Shakti in a holo. But unfortunately like the institution of the *Kaji-Paji* the requirement has also been dispensed with.

And finally it is recalled that as per the tradition ascribed to the origin of Chhow as well as the *Danda Nata* to *Bana rāja* during the 10th century A,D. It is believed that the country ruled by the six sons of Bali, including Baneswar, comprised what was called Bhanja Bhumi, Singh Bhumi, and the contiguous areas where the Chhow and the *Danda Nata* are still a living form of art.

A search for the origin of the word Chhow seems to lead no where. One has therefore to accept the word, as it is used in popular parlance, to denote this particular form of dance. In this connection it would be correct to accept the notes in the *Mayurbhanj State Gazette, 1339,* O.S., Chaitra Parva Sankhyā, by Shri Kapileswar Mishra, the editor–

The meaning of the word 'Chhow' is *chhai* or *chhabi* (picturesqueness or clowning). The performance is called

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'Chhow' because its participants dance in picturesque and colourful attair, their faces being hidden by masks. (translated)

The deck is now clear for a further detailed review of the Chhow and we leave the subject of its origin behind with the final remark that it must have been a strange type of a cantonment, unworthy of a martial community, which instead of devoting all the time to a continuous process of training and preparation for war-like activities, indulges in throwing away a huge chunk of responsibility in attempting to evolve a school of esoteric dancing.

**SHAIVA ORIGIN**

One common feature of the celebration lies in its Shaiva orientation. It is an expression of devotion through dance accompanied by a variety of instruments, largely wind and percussion. In Mayurbhanj it is a safe hypothesis that the Shaivite orientation was introduced by the kings of Mayurbhanj who came under the Shaiva influence following the decay of the Buddhist tradition and assumed the honorific title of 'Mahā Shaiva'. Since then it has remained as a strong element in the religious life of the people and has been the reason to provide the princely patronage even up to a few decades ago, to the Chaitra Parva celebrations, promoting its special form of art, and reverberating music. One may note at the same time that the presiding deity of the dance was *Bhairava.*

Says Shri Sudhir Karan (*Desh*, the 30th October, 1971)– "The Chhow was an integral part of *Gajan-Gambhira* (*Charak Puja*) and for quite a time this was a festival designed to produce comic effects when masks were used to promote a degree of drollery which was much enjoyed. The comic effects were not wholly for popular diversion but had religious significance as well. But under the ruling house of Mayurbhanj and Sareikella it began to take the shape of a serious dance with a marked classical overtone." ( translated)

The origin of the mask is being traced to the custom of wearing *Munda* (skull) by the Bhakta-dancers impersonating Shiva and Parvati in East Bengal, during *Gajan Gambhira* celebrations. Because of obvious phonetic alternation *Munda* (skull) became *Muhundā* and in the end *Mukhā* (Mask). "The wearing of *Munda* seems to have had a bearing on the wearing of the 'mask'," says Pandit Binayak Mishra.

Also during the unfolding of the Mahabirjhenda festival in Chhotnagpur, which is also celebrated as the Chaitra Parva celebration in Mayurbhanj, the sword and *lāthi*-play demonstrations are given.

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The festival need not be considered as prototype of the Mayurbhanj Chhow or of any other locality for the simple reason that the festival is manifestly Jain and the sword and *lathi* play cannot but have a spiritual bearing and significance and cannot directly and indirectly have anything to do with the *paikas* of Mayurbhanj.

In further elucidation of the non-martial origin of the Chhow it may be noted that the mere pantomime of weaponry in the large number of themes depicting discharge and parry of a hail of arrows, sword play, javelin thrusts and similar martial movements, do not mean establishing a martial *(Paik)* or cantonment *(Chhauni)* origin of the dance because those themes have been called from the sacred literature of the Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and others. These are not isolated phenomena but are common features of the Manbhum Chhow- danced all over the cultural belt of the forest dwellers of Manbhum and surrounding areas. These themes in Mayurbhanj Chhow are danced in *Hatiārdharā* (Tāndava) style mentioned later.

As for the comic aspect, there are hilarious or slangy songs, particularly by such traditional clowning couples as the Kaji Paji. It is stressed that to induce laughter was a part of the celebration as mentioned earlier, but in course of time it disappeared having fallen into princely disfavour. This is a matter of great regret because discontinuance of a popular aspect of the celebration, such as singing, dancing, muttering magic formula and circumbulation etc, which are only various practices of Shiva worships ( 'History and Culture'-Unesco P.215). Because of the obvious inability of the apparently knowledgeable people to convince the Maharaja of the inadivisability of taking such a step resulted in the avoidable mutilation of the celebrations.

The current celebrations became to that extent poorer in concept because it should be remembered that *Rasa* (emotion) and religion are mental states, and dance, drama, music and magic are only outer expressions of these mental phenomena in order to impress people. This is because the latter are always included in any religious celebrations and any taboo against these aspects, including laughter or hilarity, which happen to be the common features of religious celebrations, is not correct. Further, during the course of evolution, the rites and rituals became strictly formal, and a tendency to perform the smallest rites as correctly as the more important ones was insisted upon. It followed therefore, that there was a real fear of the entire celebration becoming null and void because of the non-observance of this aspect relating to laughter, but fortunately it did not become so.

One regrets the discontinuance of the mask in the Mayurbhanj School of Chhow as well as its classical integuments because this in-

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novative modernisation has obviously cut it from its tap-root of folk culture and has also in the process inhibited its own independent development. Incidentally it is to note that in spite of the attempt to dispense with the mask, it had not been completely successful as the masks are still being worn in *Gangābatarana* dance and a huge full size mask-cum-body of a huge snake in *Kelā-Keluni* dance. Thus the attempt to cut off this dance from its primitive moorings apparently cannot fully succeed, the primitive form coming to the surface in spite of the attempts so common in history to modernise the traditional or the primitive.

It is proposed to end this section by drawing attention to the tradition of *Bana Raja* recorded in the 'Archaeological Survey' of Mayurbhanj. There still exists a Shaiva temple in the town of Balasore. The deity is called Bāneswara. "According to a tradition", says the Survey, "Bāna Rāja had his capital somewhere near Balasore. The Linga is held in the greatest reverence and the name Bāneswara finds mentioned in the Purānas, who was obviously a Shaiva king (most probably of Adivasi origin). The earliest records left of this dynasty are inscriptions belonging to the 10th century of the Christian era. Some Bāna Lingas are now to be found in Remuna and Nilagiri, very close to Mayurbhanj and Balasore."

It is also mentioned in the *Oriya Mahabharat* that Baneswara, a devotee of Shiva, ruled in Utkal–" On the banks of the Baitarani, in the city of Sonitpur, ruled Rājā Bāneswara, the beloved of Shiva, a great warrior and of fearsome countenance and mien."

A Bāna *Linga* is also to be found in the former princely state of Bonai where Chhow dance with masks is still being performed. It may also be pointed out that about 15 K.M from the old Garjat capital of Narsinghpar (now in the Athagarh Sub- division of Cuttack district, Orissa) there are a *Dharama Devatā* and a Bāna Linga side by side in the village Padamala, and an old fort, which local legends attribute to Banasura, and the *Danda Nata* is also performed there during the month of Chaitra. Another same linga is still worshipped in the village Bāta Harichandanpur in the jungles of Keonjhar, very close to Mayurbhanj and Balasore. These are instances of wide prevalance of *Dharma* and Shiva worship proceeding side by side in the Garjats of Orissa and in the adjoining areas ruled in the ancient days by Bāna Raja. Here *Dharma*

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*Rājā* or *Dharma Devata* is still worshipped as a goddess, like the *Bhairava Buddi* in Chhow.

Further it has been stated in the *Paurusha* (1968, September) by Shri Rabi Narayan Das that the famous *Danda Nata* of Orissa was and is still being observed in various parts of Orissa in imitation of the form in which Banasura had worshipped Shiva. Also in Cooch Bihar Banaswar Mahadev is a well known *Linga*. It is so named according to tradition because it was consecrated by Bānā-sura, the Shaiva son of the Demon king Bali (*Desh.* 8th April, 1975).

Padmashri Laxminarayan Sahu, Shri Rabi Narayan Das and Shri Sudhir Karan referred to above, and Sri Binayak Mishra *(Mayurbhanj State Chronicles*, April, 1947) are of the opinion that *Charak Pujā* of Shiva (*Gājan Gombharā* of Bengal and Bihar), *Danda Nāta, Jhāmu Jātrā, Pātua Nāta* and Chhow Nāta of Orissa and of Chhotnagpur, *Maghanada* of the Gonds, *Cheddul* and *Bagada* of South India and the Devil (Mask) Dance of Tibet are the species of the same genus.

Folk art, particularly dance or music have a wide ranging prevalence and speed well over a larger span of time. Although not providing an exact parallel of a prototype of the Chhow it may be pointed out that a dynasty known as the Chhow ruled in ancient China from C. 1127 to 256 B.C. Religious practices observed during this dynasty's rule included a dance, where the personnel danced wearing masks and holding wands or sticks where the female roles were enacted by men and the dancers had to undergo strenuous exercise and training in body building. *(The Story of Civilization :* Oriental Heritage, by Will Durant). The similarity between the old Chinse dance and the Chhow as far as the masks, the wands ( or the sticks) and the vigorous nature of the dances are concerned, is remarkable. Some of these Chinese masks resembled Indian ones closely ( *Discovery of Asia* By Kalidas Nag, P 427).

It is common knowledge that cultural exchanges between India and China date back to the hoary past. There was a two way traffic between the two countries, of merchants in quest of wealth, and of scholars and savants in quest of knowledge and religious enlightenment. Many Buddhist scholars over the centuries had travelled to China at the inviation of the Emperor of the Celestial Kingdom to preach Buddhism or to explain or expand its philosophy. Of these who have travelled to India, some like Fa Hien, Heu Tsang and others were outstand-

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ing savants and scholars who had returned loaded with the knowledge of this country. One of the visible symbols of such an intercourse is the existence of over 70,000 manuscripts in the Imperial Library at Peking, representing original Indian manuscripts or their translation. In all these exchanges the port of Tamralipta (modern Tamilik) was the principal gateway and it was from here that Chinese influences must have radiated to contiguous areas of Chhotnagpur, Mayurbhanj, Sareikella, etc. In support of this inference, it may be recalled that King Subhankara Keshari of Orissa had sent an ambassador to the Chinese Emperor with a large present and the party must have embarked for China from Tamralipta.

Chinese cultural contacts and influences in broad social and religious phenomena should not, therefore, be ruled out and each living strand should be followed up and properly investigated before pronouncing any final opinion.

It is interesting to note that in the 10th-11th century, when *Bana Raja* was ruling the area from Balasore to Radho, was also the period when Khiching was being built, another name for which is Kichaka Gada. Even assuming the absence of any political link between *Bana Raja* and Mayurbhanj (a rather unlikely assumption) it is a safe inference that the Shaiva form of worship by singing and dancing of the *Bhaktas* popularised by Banasura had made its way to Mayurbhanj which is very close to Balasore.

One more point towards the authenticity of this inference is the celebration of the Chaitra Parva at the shrine of Chandaneswar, a village in the Sadar Subdivision of Balasore, where it is said, often as many as thousands of devotees (*Bhaktas)* foregather for the worship of Shiva in the form of Chandaneswar, during the annual Chaitra Parva festival. The reader is again reminded that Balasore, more so its Sadar Subdivision, within which that ancient seat of Bana Raja as well as Chandaneswar are situated, borders on Mayurbanj, and the above mentioned centres of Chaitra Parva are but a few miles from Baripada, the Capital of Mayurbhanj.

We are indebted to Padma Shri L.N Sahu for the following song from his collection, vividly and aptly describing the celebration at Chandaneswar–

> Thus at the end of Chaitra comes the *pata-jatra*, Then devoted souls demonstrate hook swinging from high poles, when others walk on the edge of swords, when still other

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groups walk on living embers, and in such merry and engaging means offer worships to the Baba ( Shiva). (translated)

The origin of this festival goes back to the hoary past and it is not a coincidence that the details of the celebration as observed by Bānā Sura are in tune with the following *sloka* called from the Bengali *Viswokosa:*

In the month of Chaitra those who please *Shankar* for a month or a fortnight or ten and seven days by worshipping him after the three usual baths by day followed by one at night, eating bland meals ( *habisya*) bedecked in various garments dancing night and day holding canes, abide in *Shiva Loka.* (translated).

The importance of fasting in the month of *Chaitra* for the Hindus did not escape the notice of even Albaurni as the following quotation indicates :

If a man fasts all the days of Chaitra he obtains wealth and joy over the nobility of his children.

Shiva, it is said in the *Mahabharat,* was so pleased with Bana Raja that in one of Bana's wars against Shri Krishna, He (Shiva) had personally taken up arms against Shri Krishna.

A legend still widely accepted, locates the site of this action in the general area known as 'Sunhat' which is an eastern suburb of the district-town of Balasore, not very far from Mayurbhanj. There are still four Lingas in this area, one is specially known as Bāneswar. The legend also has it that king Bāna used to offer prayer and worship every morning to each of them and return to his palace not earlier than mid-day, journeying 40 miles in this process. It is interesting that all these four face westwards which is apparently contrary to the general practice of the Hindus, indicating probably, that the area was covered by forests and was under the rule of the Adivasi kings, one of whom might well have been none other than the Shaiva King, our Bana Raja. The origin of the conflict was the abduction of Usha, the daughter of Bānarājā, by Pradyumna, the son of Shri Krishna. The name Usha still survives in the area in a village of the name of 'Usamera' (or more properly 'Usabedha',).

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THE CELEBRATIONS

The celebrations in Mayurbhanj start a week before the Mahāvishuva Sankrānti. People observe day long fasts and worship Shiva and Sakti. Previously the Chaitra Parva celebrations used to begin on the 17th day of Chaitra and end on the last day, thus giving it a duration of 13 days, excluding the *Charaka Puja (Udā Parva)* on the first day of Vaisakha which is the rounding off of the Chaitra Parva. The main part of the celebration is the institution of the *Bhaktās* who rigidly observe a strict code of conduct during this period, being dressed in red and invested with sacred threads, bedecked in garlands of *mallikā, champaka* and other flowers, with bells round their waist. In addition they carry canes. That is why they came to be designated as *Betra Sanyāshi* and *Sutra Sanyāshi.* During this period their respective *gotras* are changed to that of Shiva *gotra.* It is needless here to go into the details of these observances which had an obvious element of cruelty and which were prohibited by legislation in 1863. In spite of this, hook swinging, fire-walking etc. continued and are still being practised in some places. The following extracts may be noted:

> *Charak Puja* or Hook-swinging festival during which men were suspended from a pole by a hook, thrust through the muscles of the back and swing in the air, in honour of Kali. In 1868, orders of the Govt. for abolishing this festival were carried out in Birbhum district. As they thought the spring ceremonies absolutely essential before tillage, the British Office suggested they might swing a man by a rope tied round his waist instead of with a hook through his back. The compromise was accepted by some, but the better informed cultivators gloomily assured the officer that the ceremonies would have no good effect on the crops without the spilling of blood.
>
> *F. Note :-* It is right to say that very little blood was lost, the wounds caused were slight, slighter than those left behind by skewers which were fited through the cheek or tongue of the swinger during the performance. (Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol.VI. (India), W.H. Hunter, 1886, 0.213)
>
> In Mysore the fire walkers wear short yellow *dhoti* and garlands of jasmine, a pit is dug about fifty feet long and ten feet in width. It was a mass of fire. The feet of two men were examined before and after they crossed. There was

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not a slight trace of burn.(The Land of Lingon) by Aurthor Miles, P.269)

Fire walkers of the Fizi Island : It is not a game nor it is a trick practiced to impress the white foreigners. It is a religious rite, the origin of which is lost in the midst of centuries and even today it is practised in the Fizi Islands, India, Java, Japan and many of the remote Pacific Islands. The details vary but in broad outline the rite is the same in all the countries. It cannot be explained, perhaps the nearest we can get to a true solution of the matter will be found in the word faith, the power of mind over the body. But people who live in the West do not know anything. Things they cannot understand they disbelieve. Yet in the East, the wise mysterious East, many things happen, which we with all our cleverness and civilization cannot explain however hard we try; and one of these is fire-walking. The Golden Book of Knowledge. The Children's Press, London and Glassgow, page 111).

The devotees of Shiva are called *Bhaktās* in the *Danda Nata* of Orissa. They are also called *Bhagatas*. They generally are non-Bramhins. The word *Bhakta* appears to have been derived from the *word Bhakti* (devotion) or *Bhakta* (devotee). Both Guna Ratna and Raja Sekhar speak of those who take the vow of service to Siva and they are called Bhagatas (Servants) and Bhaktas (devotees) of Shiva and are also called Shaivas. Frazer in his article on Shaivism in the 'Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics' further gives instances where non-Brahmins and outcastes performed the worship of Shiva and also perform human sacrifice. This apparent castelessness of the Chaitra Parva celebration has not come about by accident. The phenomenon points to its Buddhistic origin. The Brahmins considered it as being non-Puranic and unworthy of observance by the upper castes. In *Meru Tantra* it is said, "All Brahmins Kshetryias, Vaishyas Sudras and Anulomas (half castes) should ever worship Shiva Linga with Mantras". ('Principles of Tantra ' by Wood roffe).

The *Bhaktas* at Baripada are divided into two main groups, one patronised by the King and the other by his Spouse. These *Bhaktās* are supported by the Darbar through land and other grants, on condition that the grantees observe the Chaitra Parva, which the Maharaja is traditionally expected to celebrate. Each group is subdivided into syndicates of 13, each under a *Pata Bhaktā* (Head Bhakta). To each such syndicate, is assigned a particular duty pertaining to the worship and celebration. Thus those who hold the column *(Dandas)* of the candle aloft are called *Dipa Danduā* .

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The day begins when they proceed to the river side or a confluence, in organised groups, for bathing and performance of some rites at the bathing ghat, under their respective *Pata Bhaktās.*

According to the *Bruhat Dharma Purāna* and other authorities, as pointed out by Sir John Woodrofe in *Principles of Tantra* sacred places suitable for performance of rites are the river sides, confluences, caves, *thirthas*, summits of hills, holy forests, solitary ground or at the foot of *Bel, Amalki* trees or *Tulasi* plant and sea shore or temples of Shiva. The injunction in this connection is embodied in the *Bruhat Dharma Purana* in a couplet "People should go outside the village and cheerfully offer worship to Shiva". The preliminary rites and discipline performed there under the *Pata Bhakta* is called *Hākanda.*

Dinesh Chandra Sen in his book *Banga Bhāsā O Sāhitya* says that one Ramai Pandit who probably was the author of *Dharma Purāna.* which is another name of the *Hākand Purāna* and who originated the system of *Dharma Puja*, an alternate form of Buddhist worship, had attained *moskhya* at a place called *Hākanda*. It is surmised that the word *Hākanda* as used by the *Bhaktās* is an echo of that *wond Hākanda.* In the north Balasore a tank of a diety is called *Hakanda,* according to *Promoda Dictionary* (Oriya).

After performing the preliminary rites, the Bhaktās repair to the temple of Kālikā, Shiva and Ambikā singing bhajans, and dancing with local musical instruments, burning incense, their bodies bare from waist upwards, carrying red flags atop bamboo poles. It may be incidentally mentioned here that according to Woodroffe there are 38 *upachārs*, and dancing, singing, instrumental music and reciting hymns etc., are each an *upachār.* The routine is varied to a considerable extent three days before the *Mahā Vaishuba Sankrānti* when the Bhaktās follow the *Dehuri or Dāshi* who to all appearances seem to be possessed and said to be the only individual who can divine the will of the gods. In that state, he often forecasts the condition of the harvest, the visitation of epidemic or floods and similar natural calamities. People believe that the divine voice of the *Devi* is echoed through him when he is in this trance just as the Adivasis believe their Ojhā when he is in a similar state. After completing the rituals at the Ambika temple the *Bhaktas* proceed to the palace where one group competes with the other in singing and dancing in honour of Shiva and Shakti.

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Things do not end at this stage because later in the evening continuing well into early dawn, the Chhow dance as performed is being watched by the Maharaja, his family members, distinguished guests and people in general. Around mid-night the dance is suspended to allow the *Bhaktas* to return with *Ghatas* each for one party, which are received by the Maharaja and are venerated by those present, including the Chhow artist and musicians. This dance is done by two teams (*Sahis*) that competitively evince a keen interest where strong emotions are manifested, and this psychology is encouraged by the Maharaja who maintains the *Bhaktas* and Chow dancers through various ways, including land grants, cash awards, gifts of clothes and similar marks of princely favour. It is not surprising because the dancers perform on his behalf some traditional acts required of him, and also because he is considered to be the champion and defender of the faith of the land.

It is interesting to note that the steppings of the *Bhaktā* dance are sober and graceful. The overemphasized and exaggerated steppings of the Mayurbhanj School of Chhow do not find a place or even an echo in the *Bhakta* dance. The elegant and pleasant stepping, the sonorous cadence of music and the hushed mid-night atmoshphere do generate a sense of awe and reverence. A careful observation of the *Bhaktā* - stepping over the years would seem to suggest that the original steppings of the Chhow have been preserved in this dance which because of religious association has been able to steer clear of innovation which had robbed the Chhow some of its pristine simplicity and charm. It should also be noted that the *Chouk* of the *Bhaktā* dance differs from the Chhow *Chouk* in that the height of the body is not reduced to half. It is almost a natural stance of a man standing. The low *Chouk* is necessary for higher steppings, when the dancer raises his feet almost to the level of his chin and sometimes even higher, a requirement unknown in the *Bhakta* dance.

The *Ghatas* are of three varieties. the *Sunya ghata* which is kept concealed in a Shiva temple never brought for a public view. The second is the *Nishā ghata* which is brought to Chhow arena on the night of the *Nān Pata* (Fire walking) on the second night of the Chhow dance. The last is the *Jātrā Ghata* which is brought on the last day of celebration and the last day of Chhow dance. The two *Bhaktas*, one for each party who carry the *Ghata* on their heads as also the dancers called *Ghantuāls* (*Ghanta Pātuās*), are dressed in female clothes bedecked with valuable gold ornaments, their faces smeared with vermil-

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lion and are designed to strike a note of fear and veneration among the beholders. As has been said earlier, they, like the Adivasis, do not make an image. Instead they set up and worship *Ghata* which may be described as a water-jar filled with water set up during ceremonial rites as representing a deity *(Purna Chandra Bhasakosh-Oriya)*. It may be observed that the *ghata* does not represent Shiva alone but may be conceived as representing any God or Goddess. For example, Durga can be and has been conceived to be represented by a *Ghata* denoting creation and rich harvest–a relic of the cult of fertility. The *ghata* is an earthen pitcher full of sacred water up to the neck, topped by a mango twig with leaves on its body, and the usual vermilion marks suggesting that it has been worshipped. The water of the *ghata* is not changed till the end of the celebration, and on the last day the *ghatas* are ceremonially immersed. It is by partaking of the sacred water by the Maharaja, his spouse, the *Bhaktas* and other *vratins* at the end of the last night of the Chaitra Parva and the Chhow celebrations, that the ceremonies and the dances are brought to a close. This practice of ceremonially partaking of the sacred water of the *ghatas* is continued even after the merger, except that there is no one to take the place of the Maharaja and his spouse. In this connection it is sad to observe how apparently important local individuals indulge in blaspheming, when they talk true to type uncritical foreign students of the Chhow, that the contents of the *ghata* include human semen which the Maharaja is expected to drink. Such irresponsible prattle is all the more distressing when one recalls the deep reverence and devotion with which a very large number of people who observe the fast *(vrata)*, including *Bhaktas*, some dancers as well as others, partook and still partake of the content of the *ghata*.

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## CHAPTER THREE

# GROWTH

In Mayurbhanj prior to the rule of Maharaja Jadunath Bhanj(1822-1863) the Chhow, as is understood today, was not known. Instead, the festival to celebrate *Rama Navami* during the month of Chaitra was commonly observed as Chaitra Parva festival by some form of dance, and probably in line with the original Rama Leela celebrations. At some time, one Madan Singh Babu, who came to Baripada from Dhalbhum, added some Chhow music and dance item of that locality to the *Ram Navami* dance. This dance was masked and it is not a far fetched inference that it had offered an almost compelling suggestion in favour of the introduction of the masked-dance in Mayurbhanj. Further, from the religious angle this borrowing made excellent sense because the principal character of the Sareikella Chhow, the Hanuman, had his obvious counterpart in the Hanuman of the Rama Leela and hence the pious and knowledgeable persons of Mayurbhanj found nothing objectionable in such a cultural transfusion.

During the period of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanj (1868-1882), his Bebartā and a faithful aid, Ramaharijit Bebarta Babu, who had seen the Chhow at Sareikella when he had gone there for his wedding, managed to persuade the Maharaja to obtain the services of Upendra Biswal "Ostād" of Sareikella who was given a land grant *(Lakhraj* i.e. rent free) and was appointed the Guru (*Ostād*) of the *Uttar Sahi*, the party of the North.

Two or three years after this appointment of Upendra Biswal, one Banamali Das, also from Sareikella, was similarly appointed as the *ostad* of *Daskhina Sahi*, the party of the South. These *Lakharāj* Lands are still being enjoyed by the successors of the two original *Ostads* Upendra Biswal and Banamali Das– one a Khandayat, and the other a Brahmin, who should rightly be reckoned as the *Adi Gurus* (the original preceptors) of the Mayurbhanj Chhow. This gives the lie to the theory of the Kshetriya origin of the Mayurbhanj Chhow.

Incidentally, in spite of the rigid practice of a dance item put up by one party not being repeated by the other competing party, there are a few items, viz. *Dandi, Mahadev, Jambeb, Ranga Panda* and some others, which were common to both the parties obviously pointing to the Sareikella origin, where these items were in existence before the dances were introduced in Mayurbhanj.

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It was during this period that the late Brundaban Chandra Bhanj, the then Chhotrai Saheb, had assumed the responsibility of training and performance of the Uttar Sahi, himself taking part in the dance, and the then Routray Saheb, late Gokul Chandra Bhanj performed similar service^ to the Dakhina Sahi, including personal participation in the perforr ,ance. During this stage of growth the dancers hid their faces behind masks and wore a sort of halo (*Parva)* made of bamboo strips strapped to their backs while dancing. This type of halo as well as the masks were also worn by Chhow dancers of Chitrada, Kostha, Rairangpur, Singala and many other villages of Mayurbhanj till about a couple of decades ago. Masks went out of use from the Baripada Chhow about 5 or 6 decades ago. These masks and halos are still being used in some villages of Bengal, Bihar and Rairangpur Sub-Division of Mayurbhanj. The halo was probably a survival of the wholly religious themes of the original celebrations. The team that had a larger quantity and better quality of the masks and parvas was declared the winner in the competition. The performance was confined mainly to solo and duet numbers with a few four-some dances. The quality was of course, registering a steady and slow improvement. After the death of Shri Krushna Chandra Bhanj in 1882, and during the minority of Shri Ram Chandra Bhanj, the Chaitra Parva ceremony and deliberations were just about kept alive by the device of denoting sweets to the two parties who danced for two nights in the palace.

After Shri Ram Chandra Bhanj's investiture in 1892, he detailed his brother. late Syam Chandra Bhanja, the adopted ruler of Nilagiri State, and late Sreedam Chandra Bhanja Routrai Saheb, to take charge of the training and performance of the Uttar and the Dakhina Sahis respectively, with an annual grant of Rs. 2000/- for each Sahi. These two brothers Shyam Chandra Bhanja and Sreedam Chandra Bhanja, personally participated in the actual dance performances. The competition used to generate a considerable amount of heat not only between two princely brothers but also between the participants as well as between the supporters of both the Sāhis. It is reported by Sri Baidyanath Roy, a grand nephew of Ostad late Jadunath Roy of the *Dakhin Sahi*, that on one occasion it went to the extent of Jadunath's house being burnt down in a fit of pique by (the mercurial and fiery) Shyam Chandra Bhanja of *Uttar Sahi.*

It may be noted in passing that the substantial classical modes which provide such an obvious attraction of the Chhow was the consequence of a deliberate policy on the part of the then rulers of Mayurbhanj in associating *Ostads* of known talent and calibre like the venerable late

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Jadunath Roy and late Narendranath Pal, who also had a flair for western music. Those two, among others, had handsomely contributed to the choreography and music of the Chhow and had imparted to it the permanent classical flavour. *Ostad* Jadunath Roy, previously from Khankal in Hoogly District, was a disciple of *Ostad* Murad Ali Khan of Calcutta, where he became a recognised exponent of *Khandarbani* school of Dhrupad prior to migrating to Baripada over a century ago. Subsequently he had been invited to give recitals at Banaras, where he was honoured with the title of *Sangeet Bhusan* early in the second decade of the century. It is incidentally sad to observe that one of his best disciples, *Guru* Dinabandhu Behera of Dakhin Sahi, was languishing in indigent obscurity when these lines were being written (1976). This association, indeed, was a fortunate contingency for the future growth of the Chhow. The Dhrupadist imparted the majestic gait, the slow pace, sometimes moving in jerks, the simplicity and charm of the Dhrupad permanently to the dance. A patient and critical assessment of the *Tabkas, Uphulis* and *Bhangis* would demonstrate the truth of the statement. This training in the Dhrupad cadence was not confined only to the dance-trainees. All categories of musicians, wood wind, percussion and string, were equally carefully trained in these classical features to folk tunes, a unique feature in a way. Their successors also had helped the Chhow in good measure. Sudhir Roy, the nephew of Jadunath, and Shri Rajani Kanta Pal, son of Narayan Pal, were associated with Dakhin Sahi, and Shri Kartik Chandra Pal, elder brother of Rajani Kanta Pal with the *Uttar Sahi.* Even now Sri Sanat Ray, grand nephew of Jadunath and son of Sudhir Roy is being associated with the *Dakhin Sahi.*

Aside from the sanctioned amount of Rs. 2000/- each royal brother used to spend as much as Rs. 15000/- every year. One has only to visualise its purchasing power in current currency in order to appreciate the depth of emotions the Chhow used to generate. This is not all. Both the brothers used to keep the star-performers near them during the training and performance, personally supervising their meals and rest. There used to be frequent wordy duels among the supporters of each Sahi, not always confined to the males but extended even to the bathing ghats and to women.

A part of training exercises consisted of imitating the different movements of house-wives while at the daily domestic chores, under the omnibus term *uphuli* which also includes various other movements, and will be elaborated in a later chapter. This training continued throughout the year and included introduction of a new dance theme, each such number involving an outlay of about Rs. 800/- representing the

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cost of dress and other accessories. This way it continued for quite a long time. Thereafter such numbers, i.e., *Vidyāsundar, Tāmudia Krishna, Hindustāni* etc., were added to the repertoire. Lengthy dances, expression of various passions, loftiness of character, startling themes and elegant poses and postures became the main facets of the new dances. It may not be out of place here to note the spirit of innovation which had characterised the outlook. The dance *Vidyāsundar,* for example, was composed on the line of Bengali Jātrā-performance which had swept Calcutta during that time—particularly the style of acting as well as the songs sung by one Gopāl, an inhabitant of Jajpur in Orissa. The dances without *Parvā* (halo) and masks that slowly evolved at this time, became the landmarks in the evolution and modernisation of the Chhow. Female roles were danced by boys suitably dressed. At this stage a totally new element was introduced which caused complications and confusion among the modern students and critics.

In 1911, Emperor George V was to come to India for his coronation. The Maharaja while on a visit to the U.K. had promised the Emperor an item from the traditional art of Orissa to be offered during the festivities in Calcutta. With the help of Routrai Saheb, his brother, and his cousin Bada Lal Saheb, he innovated a dance in line with the National Paika Dance of Orissa. The same dance subsequently choreographed and practised, became the celebrated 'War Dance' which incidentally had little organic affinity with the Chhow. The title 'The Oriya National Paika Dance' (and not Chhow) given by the Maharaja, also clearly indicates that he did not consider it as a part of Chhow, nor did the contemporary or successive *Ostāds* regarded it as a part of Chhow. The costumes and the weapons (the particular variety of the sword and the shield) had to be improvised for this occasion after a painstaking research. A whole troupe of almost new recruits had to be trained. This dance is basically a mock-combat with skilful thrusts between two parties and set to music and dance. The dancers are dressed in turbans along with feather-garlands round the arms and waists, and faces and bodies painted with ochre or red. Each party is clad in red or blue dhoties, 64 in number, later reduced to 32. The painting of faces and bodies with red earth is a relic of the days when soldiers used to paint their bodies in bright red and yellow colours as an extra aid to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

Apparently such customs of painting the body for military and amorous ends had substantially advanced the course of art as the following quotation from Will Durant suggests:

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Apparently the first form of art is artificially colouring of the body sometimes to attract women, sometimes to frighten the foe. The Australian native always carried with him a provision of white, red and yellow paint for touching up his beauty now and then.('*The Story of Civilisation*' P.84)

It is to be remembered that the war-dance presented by Shri Ram Chandra Bhanj Deo for a very special occasion had never been, nor was ever considered by the contemporaries, as an integral part of the Chhow. It had remained, which it is, exclusively a part of an ancient ceremony.

The Chhow unfortunately suffered a partial eclipse after the death of Sri Ram Chandra Bhanja in 1912. During the minority of Maharaja Purna Chandra Bhanj Deo an annual grant of Rs. 250/- for each *Sahi,* for the purpose of keeping up the ceremony, had been sanctioned which was all that had remained of the earlier pomp and pageantry.

This paltry amount in those days was just about sufficient to defray the cost of two months practice and rehearsals at the lowest key. The long minority administration, coupled with the complete withdrawal of patronage by Sri Purna Chandra Bhanja shortly after his accession, apparently because he had taken umbrage at some omissions and commissions on the part of a few dancers, and also because of the death of some of the old guards, became a bad time for Chhow. It was revived from that position and restored to its proper place of pride by Maharaja Shri Pratap Chandra Bhanja shortly after his assumption of the *Gādi* (throne).

The new king made sustained and energetic efforts to revive the decaying art, and as an important step to that end sanctioned an annual grant of Rs. 5000/- to each *Sahi.* By the early thirties a Committee for each *Sahi* with a Manager was constituted for proper organised presentation of the dance during the Chaitra Parva festival. The membership of the Committee was limited to a few old dancers upgraded to the rank and dignity of *Ostad* and a few willing and knowledgeable individuals of each *Sahi,* including the present writer as a member of the *Uttar Sahi.* This period of revival witnessed the introduction of new dance themes presented by solo, duet, as well as by group dances. The result was a remarkable achievement with high expertise and technical standard of execution that was much above those of the Sareikella dances of the former years. Teams of *Ostads,* dancers and committee men were often sent to observe the performances of Uday Sankar, Amla Sankar,

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Simiki and other top exponents of Indian dance as well as the dances of Balineese troupe. The features from such dances were incorporated in the Chhow dance to enhance its variety and depth.

Prior to this, the old bosses, eg., the Raja Saheb of Nilgiri and Routrai Saheb Sreedam Chandra Bhanj, in order to exhibit English dances to the Baripada public, had gone through a great deal of trouble and expense in taking the dancers to Calcutta to learn such dances, and to incorporate some of their features in the Chhow, particularly in music and dance-forms.

During this period the best of the *talas*, music and dances of the *Odisi* or the *Gotipua* school of dance in Orissa were carefully studied and incorporated in the Chhow. An interesting and fruitful union was also achieved to the extent that dances were set to Jhumur music with remarkable success.

As a reaction against introduction of European elements (dance and music) began to set in, Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanja Deo ordered that such elements be dropped barring some instrumental musical accompaniments. He also instructed that the Santal, Bhumija, Mahanta, Kolha, Bengali, Hindustani and Oriya music and dances be emphasised, although some people did not like the inclusion of non-Oriya songs.

Of the traditional dance items a large number had fallen into disuse. The astonishing range included dances representing the king and the subjects, men, women, boys, girls, *Savaras, Savarinis, Kelā, Kelunis* (Snake charmer), Dhibar, (fisherman), Bhumija, Juang, Yogi, Rushi, Sanyāsi, Dandi and so the list goes on including dances representing *card dance* set to western music, and such other different dances. They include impersonations of animals like the bear, the peacock, monkey, snake, crocodile, bull, buffalo, Garuda or the representations of divine Radha-Krishna, Gopa-Gopi, Shiva-Parvati, Madan-Rati, Ganesh, Kartikeya, Narayana, Nabagrahas and the 10 Avatārs (incarnations). The judgement of the Maharaja thus cannot be [illegible]ted and the readjustment could easily be achieved strictly keeping to the traditional, and selecting themes from such an astonishing range unknown in the annals of any popular art.

It is sometimes maintained that the late Maharaja, Pratap Chandra Bhanja wanted the *Dakhina Sahi* to be the repository of the old and the traditional Chhow, while permitting the *Uttar Sahi* to introduce modern trends. It was not correct. The winds of change had swept

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aside the mask and the halo in both the *Sahis.* Again, both the old bosses, the Raja Saheb of Nilgiri as well as the Routrai Saheb Sreedam Chandra, had introduced English and modern music and dance forms in both the *Sahis.* Further, some musical instruments playing European airs borrowed from the State Band Party, were included in the dance-music and traces of such a potpourri can still be seen.

The rehearsal and training sessions in the past had occupied the entire year, except during the minority-administration when the late Maharaja Purna Chandra Bhanja had discontinued it. Then only a two-month-*Ākharā* (rehearsal and training ) was resorted to in order to keep the religious overtones of the ceremony alive. But under Pratap Chandra Bhanja it was deemed adequate to hold training and practice sessions in the *Akharā* for about six months and the auspicious day of the *Dassarā* was chosen for its start. This choice of the Dassara had nothing to do with the alleged origin of the dance from Chhauni or cantonment.

At the same time under Maharaja's guidance new and refined group-dance themes were introduced by both the *Sahis*, the prominent being the *Kalanka Bhanjan, Kāliya Dalan, Mātru Pujā, Premika-Premikā, Garuda-Vāhan, Megha Duta, Ādi Nātya, Samudra Manthan, Kailash Leelā, Kelā Keluni, Gitā* (duet) and *Natarāja* (solo dance) of *Uttar Sahi, and Holi, Bastra Chori, Bālakrishna, Rās Leela, Giri Gobardhan, Nilādree Bije, Kirāt Arjuna, Māyā Sabari, Card dance, Nishitha Meelan, Banshi Chori* and *Rushi* (a sole dance) etc. of *Dakhina Sahi.* The practice however of excluding ladies from participation continued and is still in force.

The dance flourished and attained high standard during the rule of Pratap Chandra Bhanja Deo. But it is sad to relate that it declined almost into near oblivion after the merger of the State in Orissa, in 1949, from which year it was deprived of its life blood of princely patronage. It would have entirely died out but for the limited financial grants from the centre and the state, which made it possible for some of the old guards to put up a show of sorts during the Chaitra Parva. It continued for a couple of years after which being discouraged and demoralised the *Ostads* and the Star-performers almost lost hope and the art reached its near extinction. It goes to the credit of Sri Bhabani Kumar Das (a former member of the *Dakhina Sahi*, before merger) that at that juncture he could somehow manage with the help of some old *Ostads* and artists to organise a group which kept the dance alive till the official patronage and grants made it possible to be revived in its present shape. He presented separate shows before the first Governor General of In-

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dia, Raj Gopala Chari, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Neheru, and obtained an annual grant of Rs.5,000/- which was subsequently raised to Rs. 10,000/- which provided the wherewithal to keep it alive. In addition, Shri R.C.Dash, the then I.G. of Police, Orissa, and a former manager of the *Uttar Sahi* was detailed to visit Baripada and was charged with the function of creating an infra-structure for the development of the Chhow on behalf of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Orissa. He organised the present body (Mayurbhanja Chhow Nrutya Pratisthān) which was registered under the Societies Act with the District Magistrate and Collector as the ex-officio Chairman and Sri Suresh Chandra Das, Advocate, as the Secretary, and other members including the present writer, to look after the management, training and performance of the dance. The Central Government further provided finance in 1968 for establishment of a school for imparting instruction in the art, but it seems the project could never take off.

The foregoing is a brief but authentic account of the growth of Mayurbhanj Chhow, free from hearsay and similar unreliable evidence. As may be seen the antiquity of this dance-form does not go beyond about 100 years, and its evolution has gone through many ups and downs.

A ray of further hope is provided by the old boys who are still alive, but who do not belong to the official organisation, and have taken initiative to resuscitate the old art in both the *Sahis*. They themselves take part in the dances and also train the new entrants. It is gratifying to record in this connection that one artist of the non-official group has been honoured by the State Government, and two artists of the official group by awards from the Central Government. At the same time one likes to mention the most important contribution of late Shri Dibakara Bhanja, to the development of Chhow in Mayurbhanj. It was he who had resurrected the art from the oblivion assigned to it by late Shri Purna Chandra Bhanja. This was a remarkable achievement. From the year of its revival in the early thirties till his death, he rendered yeomen service to the art as the father-figure of the *Dakhina Sāhi*. Those who had various opinions about the origin and development of Chhow in Mayurbhanj did well to have his views published in the official Gazettee of the Government of the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj obviously with the knowledge and approval of late Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanja Deo ('Bhanja Pradeep' 1342 O.S. by Dibakar Bhanj Babu). Shri Suresh Chandra Mishra and Shri Sureswari Prasad Bhanj as the managers of

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*Dakhina Sāhi* should also be remembered for making constructive contributions to the development of the art.

A review of the Chhow so far indicates that this dance is only a part of the Chaitra Parva celebrations current in most of the erstwhile native states of Orissa, and a few other places in the adjacent areas, and supported by Tikayat Nrupendra Narayan Singh Deo, who in his monograph *Singhbhum, Sareikella and Kharaswan, Through the Ages* says, that whenever the Chaitra Parva or the Chhow dance is performed, whether it be in Sareikella, Kharswan, Porahat, Gamharia, Bhurkuli, Bijoy, Nuagaon, Jaddiha, Sonua, Chakradharpur, Kendra, Kerikella, Dugni, Icha, Roruan, Baripada, Bonai, Nilagiri, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Talcher, Jhumpudia or Balarampur, the same *Jatra Ghata* ceremony must be performed. The underlying rituals of Chaitra Parva are the same as those of the *Danda Jatra* or *Danda Nata* of South Orissa and the Garjats.(P.96)

Padmashri L.N.Sahu and Shri Sudhir Karan have opined that the *Danda Nata* of Orissa, the *Ganjan-Gambharia* or the *Charak Puja* of Bengal, Devil dance of Tibet and the Chhow dance belong to the same genus of which there are more species than the above mentioned ones.

It has been mentioned earlier that prominent members of the Raj family, the then Raja of Nilagiri, who was the Chhotarai Saheb of Mayurbhanj, and the Routrai Saheb of Mayurbhanj, used to dance personally without assigning any reason for this rather unusual practice. The reason obviously was not just a consuming love for the art. The matter went deeper. The entire Raj family religiously and sumptuously observed every item of the Chhow for Chaitra Parva celebrations, the *Bhaktās* observing the *Brata* (vow) part of it on behalf of the Maharaja and his spouse. The cadets of the family not only observed the scheduled fasts and remained awake at nights to receive *Ghatas*, but also participated in the dance in order to invoke the blessing of both Shiva and His spouse, the Devi, for the well-being and prosperity of the family and the people of the land. The purpose of the entire celebration has been to worship the Deity with vocal and instrumental music and dance. The dance produces a sense of pleasure, a *rasa* in the modern spectators, and it is easy to render the same mood in the princely participants of the former days. And yet it was not the whole or even an important part of the story. There had been many and varied expositions of dance and other art-forms at Baripada. Some of these were artistically superb. And yet none of them could develop roots locally and none except the

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Chhow, could persuade or seduce a member of the Raj family to the extent of even a single personal participation. That the Chhow could achieve it was not primarily due its artistic contents but because of the sense of fear, awe, mysticism and reverence generated by the entire gamut of the Chaitra Parva celebration that faithfuly followed injunction of the *Brihat Dharma Purana*.

> Pious people should renounce all other religious forms and should dedicate themselves to the worship of Shiva. They should cheerfully keep vigils at night and should derive pleasure by generating a variety of grand music. Shankar is pleased with that devotee who with a joyful heart sings and dances. On the day of *Sankranti* as enjoined in the *Sastras* the pious observances should be brought to an end after the completion of the *homa*.

To conclude, the dance was the grand finale of a series of religious observances and celebrations deemed to be of intense and vital significance to the Raja's family for the happiness and well being of the family and for the people. It was not, and could not have been in origin a secular and slightly frivolous attempt of a group of soldiers to while away wearisome evenings during periods of rest in cantonments for which simple and martial forms of dance with appropriate nomenclature were current in Mayurbhanj, in Orissa, and presumably in every country where armies are maintained.

No wonder then that the ancient ruling houses of India driven by the ambition of power, wealth and conquest worshipped Shiva who was wont to confer boons on the devotees. It therefore should be deeply appreciated that what today is a joyous religious festival of Shiva-worship to please our eyes and ears, had been a most serious matter, almost a matter of life and death, to the ancient princes and the people. That is one of the important reasons why the members of the ruling houses of Mayurbhanj and Sareikella took part in the dances, and some of them, notably Routrai Saheb Sreedam Chandra and Lal Saheb Harish Chandra did develop into celebrated maestros. A prince of Sareikella came to be recognised as a top exponent of the Sareikella School of this dance. That is why the ruling houses evinced such an apparently unusual interest in Chhow when there were literally scores of other dances performed in Mayurbhanj to which no attention whatsover was paid, the reason being all that it signified including music and other aspect, was of a devotional nature implying an element of compulsion to dance as a form of worship.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## TRAINING AND PREPARATION

We have observed elsewhere that during the rule of Shri Ram Chandra Bhanj training practice and preparation for the Chhow continued from year to year. The end of one performance on the day of the Maha Vishuva Sankranti was the signal for the beginning for the next. We have also noted that during the minority-administration following the untimely death of Shri Ram Chandra Bhanj as well as during the last seven years of the rules of Shri Purna Chandra Bhanj, the Chhow was just about kept alive with a training and practice for two months financed by a shoe-string grant of Rs. 250/- to each *Sāhi.* It was left to Pratap Chandra Bhanj to fix up six months as the minimum period required for a proper training and for an effective presentation of the dances. Thereafter developed *Akharās* from the day of *Dasarā*. No particular religious significance need be read into the selection of the day for the beginning of the practice except that it was an auspicious day and a sacred day of more than an ordinary importance.

As a solemn prelude both the Sāhis offer elaborate Pujā to Shiva in the form of *Bhairab* accompanied by drum, *Chadchadi, Dhumsa* and *Mahuri* music along with offerings of flower and *prasād* as well as a piece of red cloth for consecration.

After the *Puja* the consecrated scarlet cloth is cut into small pieces and the *Ostads* tie a piece round the right wrists of each of the dancers. This is called *Nāndā-Bandhā* implying an implict contract being sealed with the piece of the consecrated red cloth that the *Ostad* will give his best to the bearer-dancer and that the latter will follow the former's instructions and advice not only in spirit but in action till the day of *Parva Palan,* i.e., the end of the final ceremonies, on the day of the first Vaisakh. This ceremony in *Gajan-Gambhira* or *Bhakta Parva* (Charak) of Bengal and Bihar is known as the *Kapu* or *Dora Bandhā*. Thereafter the trainees ask for blessings of the *Ostāds* as well as of the elders present, by touching their feet, and in an appropriate and solemn dance accompanied by instrumental music, invoke the grace of *Bhairava* in which others present also participate emotionally.

It may be mentioned here that the presiding deity of the Mayurbhanj Chhow is *Bhairava,* who is conceived as Shiva by the *Dakhin Sahi* who do not offer blood sacrifice, but as a *Devi* by the other (*Uttar Sahi*) in the name of *Vairab-Budhi* to whom blood sacrifice is offered. To

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continue the digresion, Pandit Surya Narayan Das in the first volume of his *History of Oriya Literature* had stated that in various ancient sites of Orissa mutilated images of Buddhist Gods are still being worsipped by the Hindus as Budhā and *Budhi Thākurāni.* Again *Dharma Mangal* is sung in the Raddho country (in West Bengal) and one not infrequently comes across the *Dharma Gita* by Mahadev Das being sung or chanted by the Bāthudi, Pāna and other tribes in Mayurbhanj. At almost all places in Mayurbhanj where the Chhow dance is observed, the presiding deity is also desginated as the *Vairab Budhi.* Not only does it end there. The Chhow festival with the *Bhakta* dance at Chitrada and some villages in Rairangpur sub-division of Mayrbhanj, is also observed during the month of Vaishak, apprently in order that these celebrations coincide with the Buddhist religious functions during the same month. *Dharma Debatā* in the form of *Vishnu, Brahma*, the Sun God, the Shiva, the Buddha and even as the *Adi Mātā (Adya Sakti)* Goddess representing the forces of creation to which blood offerings, as is the custom followed by the *Uttar Sahi*, are presented. Obviously far from being dead, the Buddhistic religious conceptions are very much alive,deep down in the Hindu relgious consciousness. To conceive *Bhairava* in the female form as *Vairava Budhi* is apparently strange and a word of explanation will not be out of place. The Buddhists worship the Bhddha as the *Dharma Devata* and in course of time because of polytheisite religious acceptance the Hindus began to worship the same.

A word about selection of trainees. Physically the trainees should not be too tall or too short, should not be given to obesity, and should be of pleasing proportions, broad shouldered, and wasp-waisted. They should be soft spoken, should have pleasant voice, should be sincere and painstaking. These are the traits which are looked for in the new recruits.

The reputed Gurus (*Ostads*) come from the ranks of those who posses experience and expertise in all the different aspects of the dance and are skilled at picking apt pupils, and are well spoken or as well as patient, persevering, and are of balanced or placid temperament.

During the training and practice considerable emphasis is placed on orgainsed physical training under the expert supervision of the *Gurus*. Every morning each one is made to undergo various forms of physical exercises designed to develop supple limbs and wind (breath) and endurance. Besides running, the exercises included *danda, naunā* (bending,) and a few *Yogic* āsanas. In addition they roll on the ground and

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also imitate the walk or movements of animals, e.g., crawl of the crocodile, the leap of the horse or the tiger, jump of the monkey, along with various ways of twisting the body and similar other items. These exercises develop and strengthen every limb and muscle of the body, tending to make the body supple, vigorous and capable of sustained and vigorous activity over a long period, so essential to the dance. They are often encouraged to increase the breath by running on sandy river beds. The intelligent reader will notice that this regimen helps in building a healthy mind in a healthy body making other forms of physical exercises superflous. In this connection an apt observation of Swami Sivananda on the *Yogic Home Exercise* is quoted below as it sums up the ideal and ethos of the Chhow :

> In the vast Universe man alone is the breaker of laws and violator of rules. He is the single example of lawlessness and discord. He wilfully diregards the law of health. He deliberately ignores the rules of hygiene and right living and then weeps when he is ailing. Exercises eliminate from the joints and muscular tissues the waste products that induce fatigue.

Side by side with the physical exercises designed to build the body a strict watch is kept on the intake of food and drink by the trainees. Drinking, smoking and similar intemperate pleasures like keeping long nights, are tabooed during this period. The trainees are made to eat nutrant food comparatively rich in animal and vegetable protein in addition to its caloric value.

Ideally the aim of these intense and anxious efforts is to fashion an individual, who is of good and pure habits, given to industry and humility, affable and intelligent, and of good memory and deep feelings. These then are the measures for toning up the trainees before starting to take the first or preliminary lessons of the dance. There is a real snag which is sometimes not adequately guarded against. The accent on fitness often, unless the *Ostads* wisely draw the line, tend to make the trainee muscle-bound and ramord-stiff, the very opposits of what he should physically be, that is, supple, pliant and soft, thus capable of producing the most elaborate and intricate movements.

We shall now proceed from the Gym to the training floor and briefly review the initial systems and methods that help the trainees to the steps and movements of the dancers in a series of graduated lessons.

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**DHARANA**

The mode or the style of the dance is called *Dhāranā* in the parlance of the Chhow. Sometimes the *Thāni* is synonymously used to denote the same concept as the *Dharana*. Both the words have a lighter connotation as well, i.g., some speak in a particular *Thani* or *Dharana* (manner & *bhangi*) or Shri Krishna stands in a *Trinbhanga Thani* or *Dharana*. Thus the two words used earlier, *Chhai* and *Chhataka* are interchangeably used so frequently that there is no need for further elaboration. There are two main *Dharnas* and the third is a combination of first two. The first is called *Hatārdharā* or the *Tāndava* style, the second is the *Kalibhangā* as softer erotic style, *Lāsya*, also sometimes called *Kali Katā* (both expressions implying the same thing). The third is the *Hatiaradhara-Kalibhanga* where elements of both the dances may be observed mainly in course of performance. *The Hatiaradhara* (Tandav) and the *Kalibhanga* (*Lasya)* are the main *dharanas* or modes because the word *tāla* is an accronym of *Tandava* and *Lasya* taking *Tā* from Tandava and *La* from *Lasya*. It is mentioned by Kalidas in *Malavikagnimitram* that Shiva himself in his *Hara Gouri* form had brought about these twin divisions of dances dancing *Tandava* with one half of his Shiva body and the *Lasya* with the other half in the form of *Gouri* body. It may be mentioned here in passing that the dance *Kailash Leela* of *Uttar Sahi* seeks to present a theme on this tradition with Shiva dancing the *Tandava* in four *rasas*, in four appropriate talas and tunes, and Parvati dancing the *Lasya* in four *rasas* in four *talas* and tunes, before the two dance together in the *Sringara Rasa* thus demonstrating all the nine *rasas* (a feast of beauty).

According to the *Yoga Sāstra* the meaning of the *Dharana* is to hold fast to perform the *Yogic* exercises fixing one's attention firmly on one's presiding deity. And every effort is bent towards fixing and holding the attention of the dancer to the intricacies of movements and music in order that he may produce a highly polished and expert performance. The *Ostads* and trainees then attempt to reach a mental level of connection which in the language of Evereth M. Schrek *(Principle and Style of Acting)* "freeing the mind of all irrelevant matters and becoming absorbed in thought or action of immediate concern because life on the stage is highly concentrative. Time and action move with great rapidity." As the *Tandav Laxmanam* on The *Fundamentals of Ancient Hindu Dancing* by B.V.Narayanswami Naidu says (p/14):

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Nothing is left to chance. The actor no more yields to the impulse of the movements in gesturs than in the spoken words, precisely the next of the play remains the same whoever the actor may be... so there is no room for any amateur on the stage. In fact the amateur does not exist in the Oriental Art."

At this stage an elucidation of each of the three forms of the dance would be appropriate

**(a) Hatiārdharā - The Tandava mode**

According to *Nātya Sāstra* the dancer holds a weapon, be it a bow and an arrow, a sword and a shield, a mace or a pike, and dances. The different moods are enacted by quick steps and leaps, or by turning and twisting, or by leaping from a position when the weight of the body is distributed evenly on both feet. Thus different characters, *Veera* and *Roudra* rasas, are dance- portrayed. As the description indicates, the actions emphasised are hitting, splitting, cutting, piercing, and a gashing of the teeth in pantomime, thereby highlighting the qualities of anger, heroism, patience, self-sacrifice, verve and gusto and similar heroic or mental attributes, depending on the character sought to be dance-portrayed. This form is peculiarly a male-function. As the following quotation from *Sangeet Darpan* by Chatura Damodar described, "In order to generate *Roudra Rasa* where a man dances in *Veera rasa* with great animation and verve, he is said to have danced the *Tandava.*"(Translated)

Another view is that the *Tandava* form was invented by Tandu as the following quotation from the *Sangeet Ratnākar* would have it- "It is called *Tandava* as it was created by Tandu."

**(b) Kalibhangā**

Unlike *Tandava* there is no demonstration of *harshness*. The dance form is soft in rhythm and movement and is pleasant to behold. This form is peculiarly suitable for females and seeks to stimulate the sentimates of affection, eroticism and similar intensly emotional feelings, generally summed up in the concept of the *Sringara Rasa*. To quote from the *Sangeet Rantnākar*—"Eroticism is stimulated by *Lashya,* i.e. suggestive and winning gestures and movements, presented by a soft and rounded body, pleasant to behold".(Translated)

In this form the age old female wiles are brought into focus,e.g., a winning face, an engaging smile, skilful movements of the eye in to-

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ken of invitation or surrender, etc. while dancing seductive themes accompanied by lilting songs set to soft music. The appeal of this form often rises over the mere erotic and takes the viewer to savour the beauty and charms of the gifts of life, e.g., the aroma of the flower, the flavour or the beauty of garlands, the charms of a garden and similar good things of life.

A few words may seem to be necessary at this stage to explain the concept of *Kalibhanga* because unlike the *Hatiaradhara* or *Tandava* it is not easily understood nor does the name suggest the meaning, having only the forces of an usage. The word is a compound of *Kali+Bhanga,* in some usages *Katā* in place of *Bhang.*

Originally the Chhow was largely a solo performance, occasionally varied by a duet and group-dances, without any vocal accompaniment elucidating the theme. It was danced in slow but magestic cadence and in a complicated *tāla*. It is common knowledge that the viewers find it a trifle boring as the presentation gets going and develops in the main tala or its permanent feature. After the lapse of a period, because of a lack of variety, the slow and majestic music (tune and *tala*) tended to induce a sense of monotony in the individuals who were without a finer appreciation of even a top class classical music, the number of audience invariably thinned out as the recital progresses and the presentation becomes complex leaving only initiated as well the other musicians to enjoy the recital till the end. In course of time the maestros obseved this tendency and proceeded to remedy it by conjoining more than one simpler or popular forms of music and *tala* to the permanent feature as an element of variety. As against the old system of the dance being complicated in a single *tala* and single tune, variations were introduced in the main *tala* for celebration of the story and for this purpose different types of music were set to different simple and popular *talas*. Even popular tunes were introdued without , of couse, doing any violence or injury to the permanent feature of the dance. This part was confined to the period between the prelude and the grand finale. This portion is called the *Kali* exactly in the same sense as the word is used in Indian music and poetry. Guru Krishan Chandra Naik is of the same opinion. Beause the old monolithic theme is split into different sections, the process is technically called *Kali-Bhanga* or *Kali Kata Bhanga* and *Kata* referring to the same meaning–splitting. The best and the most obvious illustration of such break-up is the *Kailash Leela* dance when all the nine *rasas* are elaborated with appropriate *rāgas* and *rāginis*, Shiva in *Roudra, Veera, Bhayānak* and *Vivastha Rasas* in *Malkosh, Hindol, Brundābani, Sārang* and *Surat Malhār ragas* respec-

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tively and Parvati in *Sānta, Karuna, Adbhuta* and *Hāshya* in *Jogiyā, Janapuri, Pilu* and *Adana* tunes respectively, and lastly both in *Sringra Rasa* in *Bhairabhi Rāgini.* Incidentally there are nine *Rasas,* not merely eight, as it is commonly computed from *Bharat's Natya Sastra.* This is apparently incorrect, Abhinaba Gupta, the connoisseur and critic of the art of Hindu Dancing and a commentator of Bharat has, indicated 9 *rasas.* This view has the support of Sarangadeva, in his *Sangeet Ratnākar.*

Shri Baishnab Charan Basak in his *Visva Sangeet,* opines that, "*Thumuri* is the name of *Tala* but *Toppa* songs set to this *Thumuri Tāla* are also called *Thumuri* Songs". The unique feature of the *Thumuri* is that two or even three *rāginis* may be induced for rendering a single *Kali* or *Charan.*

The *Mahadev Dance* (solo) common to both the *Sāhis* is all the more remarkable because this dance is demonstrated in the nine *tālas*- a remarkable creation, like that of *Kailāsh Leelā* dance poluted out earlier. The foregoing is not a discourse out of the present context, because *Thumuri* has a link with dance and as such with the Chhow also. Says O. Goswamy in his book *The Story of Indian Music* -"Thumuri means a graceful stamp of the foot. This indicates its connection with Dance". Thus the concept of *Kali* has rightly been used by the maestros of the Chhow who had drunk deep in the fountain of Indian classical music. For the technical word for music throughout India is *Sangeeta.* In Indra's heaven we find *Gandharvas* are the singers, *Apsarās* the dancers, and *Kinnars* are performers on musical instruments, (*The Music of India* by Popley ).

Thus then is a composite concept integrated into a complex single idea by people who were highly skilled in all the components of dance movement– rhythmic, vocal and instrumental music and song. Any discussion of one part or facet therefore inescapably leads to a discussion of all others which would follow in due sequence.

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CHAPTER FIVE

# LANGUAGE

The dance has a powerful language at its command with its peculiar alphabets, and although has been evolved to meet a specific artistic necessity, does not materially differ from those of the other dances. Its roots go deeper than the spoken language– indeed the "sign language", the practice of conveying human ideas through signs and gestures, must have preceded the human speech by a large margin of time. Even with the presence of a highly developed form of speech, this 'sign language' still plays a powerful role in the growth of an infant for the first five years. Unlike the spoken language it is easy to understand, easy to read and difficult to commit mistakes. Hence it is the common possession of all the classes and categories of a society from the kings to the beggars. It is also free from the trammels a language is heir to, within a composite or a plural community like India, or in the international context. It is thus a powerful unifying factor and in combination with 'language' of similar or allied disciplines provide an avenue through which man in course of ages has sought to unravel the grand design of the universe and to look for reality beyond sense preception, and thus attempt to reach out to the Absolute.

## IDIOMS AND ALPHABETS

**Chouk:** As the rehearsal begins with the recapitulation of the alphabets, a few words on it would not be amiss. The basic stance is known as the *chouk* where the artists try to form a square, the sides being from the ankle to the knee, and from the knee to the waist. A similar figure resembling a *chouk* may also be formed with the arms and is required in a few dances. In this the left hand is held against the chest, and the arms from the elbow to fingers are held parallel to it. The right hand is held above the head, fingers closed and the arm is held parallel to left arm below.

The credit for such a stance goes to the *Ostads* who have perfected it after a good deal of conscious care, not knowing probably that they have re-discovered forms prevalant in Buddhist art before or during the early Christian era.

It is emphsised that the *chouk* is only a basic stance and is invaluable as a training aid, but does not form the basic stance of all the dance-themes, as some conceptionally and by definition prohibit any resort to the usual *chouk*, i.e., the *Dandi, Krishna, Nataraja and Mahadev*

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(where both the hands of Mahadev are held above the head during the entire duration) dances, and all the female roles. The masters often compare the *chouk* with the foundation of a house. Just as a house with a defective or insufficient foundation becomes unsound and liable to early collapse, similarly a defective chouk prevents vigorous steppings and body-movements as required in an elegant presentation, because the centre of osciallation of the body and even the distribution of the body-weight are thrown out of gear, making movements jerky, and lacking in grace and finish, because the body would become unsteady and lacking in stability for purposeful articulation. Like some Yogic *āsans* the head, neck and the spiral columns are held in one rigid straight line. This has the secondary effect of the chest bulging out, while the chin is drawn in, and the eyes look straight ahead. The following description highlights the importance of the *chouk* as indispensable to a polished and error-free training of the body and subsequent presentation.

All things in the mechanical structure of the body conspire to prove that man is made to stand erect, and with this erect position are associated numerous consequences connected with his superiority over other species. His feet are having a base which is larger in proportion to his body so that the centre of gravity can be easily kept vertically over it-a condition which is essential to his stability. The legs in their natural positions are placed at right angles to the soles of the feet, and are therefore, vertical when latter are horizontal. The centre of gravity of the trunk is at some distance in front of spinal columns, as would therefore have a tendency to inclusive forward so that the body would take the position of that of a quadruped in which the spinal column would be horizontal, the upper part of the trunk being supported by the arms, the hands performing the duties of the forefoot.

Man is unique. He is the only living species that has a culture. Man as an animal possesses a number of characterstics which qualify him for culture. Among these may be mentioned the erect postures which free the forelimbs from nonlocamotory activities.

The foregoing emphasises the importanceo of assuming the true and firm *chouk* for a dancer. During a dance there is a continuous threat of being thrown off balance, because of distribution in the centre of oscillation which may result in the dancer touching the ground with his hand to steady himself. This is considered to be a very serious disqualification and is penalised with a low score in a competitive dance. This fault is almost always due to the inability of the dancer to assume the correct and firm *chouk*.

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Without a practised *chouk* the Chhow dance would hardly be possible which is also true to other dances. Vikramaditya in his reply to Indra's querry about the reason for preferring Urbashi replied interalia, "In a dance the square (chouk) of the body is all important".

It is stated in the dance manuals *(Sastra)* that the usual indication or prelude to a dance, is the stance of the square *(chouk)* formed by the feet while the dancer's (dancing girl's) supple hands move gracefully like a creeper.

In *Tandava Lakshanam, Saustava* is said to have been achieved when the hip is in a line with the ear, the head, the shoulder, the elbow and the chest. This is because, in good dancing the movements of the hands and the feet should accord with those of the waist, side, chest, back and the belly. As the movements and steppings of the Chhow are sometimes quick and vigorous, the dancer is taught to represent a deeper *chouka*, reducing his body height almost by half, which facilitates and makes it easy for him to import grace and beauty to the movements of his body.

A further reason for concentrating anxious attention to the *Chouka* is because of the overwhelming emphasis being put on the movements of the feet and arms for effect. Hence every attempt is towards ensuring that these movements are executed with verve and practised skill, and the emphasis on the *chouk* is its near complete reliance only on the movements of the feet and the arms for producing emotional impact leaving minor roles to the fingers, the eyes and the head. This is apparently because the dance originally was a masked performance which imposed constraints on effective movements of the head and the eyes for making any emotional impact on the viewer.

With the foregoing in view, the Masters of each of the two *Sahis* have devised the chouk in which the feet are kept apart in a straight line and presents no difficulty to the viewer. The right foot is placed not in line with left but a trifile forward and the artists of both sides consider it a part of *Dharana*. Thus there appears to be a bit of confusion, but it is of minor consequence, as there is no single stance or *chouk* accepted in other dances as had been mentioned earlier.

The discerning reader must already have anticipated that the differences are not confined only on the *chouk* but may also be observed in the style of dancing, the composition of the *bhangis* may extend even to the *talas*. Even the dance themes common to both the *Sahis*, i.e. *Jambeb, Dandi, Mahadev* and *Ramasoka* etc. demonstrate these subtle difference due obviously to different *Gharwanas*.

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The design and taste differed depending on the talents of the respective Gurus, just as *Gharwanas* or traditions of different maestros of classical music are found to demonstrate certain differences, rather individual peculiarities of tradition because each such tradition has been established by a particular combination of *Tarkib* (ways) and *Kartab* (doing)

As will be seen, what matters is whether the correct technique for a proper presentation of a dance is resorted tc. ı hus, it is not difficult to see that in both the *chouk* the feet in line of the *Dakhin Sahi* and the right foot a trifle ahead of the left of the *Uttarsahi*, completely achieve this end. But as a result of the proper control of the 'vital centre' as a consequence of *chouk* the lower abdomen is pulled in, the chest is thrown out, the spinal cord becomes a straight line and the head is held erect. Unless the foregoing is achieved, no proper presentation of any dance is possible and because no shortcoming has been detected as flowing from either of the *chouks* retarding the highly skilled performance, the subject should be closed with the note that it is an understandable 'agreement to disagree' as is so often noticed between experts- the fault does not lie witht the *chouks*. For dancing the female roles the dancer stands with legs close, unlike the male *chouk*, the obvious reasons being different elegant and graceful foot and body movements, a subsequent adoption from other dance forms.

**Tabakā :** Having reviewd the *chouk* it is now the turn of *Tabaka* for a detailed review. According to an opinion the word is derived jointly from two words *Toppa* and *Thumuri. Toppa* or *Tabaka* is the formal walk or step (*Thumuk)* of a dance or a graceful movement of the foot. This formal movement or gait or *Thumuk* naturally assumes different forms and styles depending on the theme of the dance requiring movements forward, backward or side ways leaps that contain steps depicting a sense of abandon. These steps or *thumuks* have been formulated from the movements or activities of men. That *thumuk* is associated with the following quotations from the *bhajan* of Tulasi Das

> His ankle bells ring as Rama Chandra toddles (*thumuk*)
> And as he falls and rolls on the ground while attempting to run, the mother, Dasarath's Queen, gathers him around her arms.

It appears that this concept does not reach back to any hoary antiquity. Music and the allied arts had reached a high standard under the patronage of the great Moghals when *Dhrupad, Kheyal* and similar classical *ragas* and *raginis* had been performed with skill. With the on-

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set of social change, consequent to the break up of the Moghal Empire, India came to be divided into a number of petty states and these new patrons, the small potentates, found the sophisticated and complex form a little too much for them, and to suit the mental range of the new patrons, in the 18th century, lighter forms of music with a tinge of erotic suggestion termed as the *Thumuri*, were evolved. The conseqence was that the classical forms, i.e. the *Dhrupad*, the *Kheyal* etc. suffered an eclipse and the *Thumuri* gained in popularity.

It has been pointed out that the end of the 18th century witnessed an abortive rennaissance, elegant and fashionable, but extremely mannered, and this was expressed in the fullest manner in the *Thumuri*. Without going into the obscure origin of the *Thumuri* it is sufficient to point out that one Sadik Ali Khan, a musician in the court of the Nawab of Oudh, had given shape and form to it, and it attained its full bloom and beauty in the hands of another musician of the Lucknow School, Maijuddin, (*The Story of Indian Music* by O. Goswamy)

Here in Mayurbhanja in similar manner, the Raja's family members, ably assisted by the court musicians and dance artists, had added new dance forms and themes as well as new musical elements to the Chhow during the term of the present century.

To continue with the discussion of the *Tabakas* or the gait, the nearest rendering of *Thumuk*, both of which mean movement by a graceful stamping of the feet in all dances including the Chhows. It is a prime unit of movement or gait, and it is used by the dancer to break out of the *chouk* in order to approach the arena before beginning the actual dance.

The *Tabakas*, it must be clearly understood, is as important to the Chhow as a *Gamak* is to the classical music and both perform the similar offices, i.e., maintenance of continuity while sliding from one *bhangi* to another (between the different movements) in one case, and the transition from one note to the other in case of music. Without the use of *Tabakas* the dance would suffer from the lack of rhythm and continuity just as non-use of *Gamak* would mutilate the music and make it jarring to the ear while sliding from one note to other. *Tabaka* is thus anologous to *Gamak* because both the concepts imply movement, *Gamak* being derived from the root *Gam* which implies walking.

There are various such gaits or body movements but the maestros have fixed a minimum number for the trainees, leaving the rest to be used during an actual performance, depending on the nature of the theme, the character and the appropriate *bhangis* (postures) to be por-

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trayed. Needless to mention, the position of the hands necessarity changes with different *Tabakas* or gaits. Some example being, the position of the hands during the *Dandi* dance where the left hand is held almost parallel to the thigh instead of being held above the head as in the *chouk* position, holding *Kamandalu* (water pot), used by the Indian ascetices (*Dandis*). As has been mentioned earlier, the other example being the position of the hands in Krishna dance when both hands are held in the usual position playing on the side flute, or for that matter the upraised arms during the Mahadev dance.

The *Tabaka* are six in number, such as *1. Sadā, 2.Modā, 3. Laharā, 4. Dheu. 5.Dubā, 6.Uskā* according to *Dakhin Sahi.* It is to be noted that what is generally termed as the *Dheu* is not so named in the *Uttar Sahi.* Instead it is called *Baga Tabaka.*

These *Tabaka* are taught and practised in different solo tal as beginning from *Chitā Ghantā, Sikari, Rakta Pichu Sandhamona, Nirā Pandā, Sisamobana, Mayura* and *Brundābani* etc.

It is interesting to note here that during the Chhow dance performance in Sareikella, after daily preliminaries of the Bhaktas in the evening, comes Brundaban (Hanuman who destroyed the Madhuban of Ravan) dancing to dance arena through the streets with great glee and goes back to the temple. After this the Chhow dance continues, *Kalika Ghata* or the *Kama Ghata* dance ends with Brundabani music. Hence *Brundaban tala* used at the end of *Tabaka* training at Baripada is associated with the Chhow dance and its rituals. For dancing in female roles, the movements in the *Pātālamoni tala* calculated to produce soft movements, is taught.

**Uphuli :** Having brodly discussed the basic unit of the dance *tabaka*, the basic body movement, we will now discuss the *uphuli*, which can flow only from a perfect *tabaka*. The word *uphuli*, is a corruption of the words *Upalakshya*, *Upalakhana*, or *Uparupaka* all or conveying the sense of imitation. The imitation is in relation to the steps or movements in a dance in imitation of the flight or movement of birds, animals, or imitation of the actions and movements of men and women while engaged in daily domestic work.

The animal dances of Juangs of Keonjhar like those of vulture, bear, deer and peacock are justly famous. The other meaning of the word is *Ullamphana-Lamphha* i.e., to skip or to hop or to spring. It would be noticed that the concept is complex and it is to be expected that the

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*Ostads* often range themeselves in hostile camps when it comes to accepting any one as a proper *Uphuli* or its actual number. In the synopsis of the *Adinatya* dance, published on the occasion of 1940 Chhow celebrations, the *Uphuli* had been braketed in the *Karans* of the *Bharata Natya Sastra*. Although one view is that there are 24 genuine *uphuli* plus a few more, 36 such have been accepted and are taught for quite some years. These are :

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|---|---|---|
| 01. | *Gotiuthā* | Collection of Cowdung. |
| 02. | *Gobar Golā* | Preparing the cow dung mire. |
| 03. | *Chhadā Dā* | Sprinkling the mire. |
| 04. | *Kharakaa* - | Sweeping. |
| 05. | *Chhuncha Dā* | Spreading or plastering. |
| 06. | *Jhunti Dā* | Drawing designs on the floor. |
| 07. | *Bāsana Majā* | Cleaning of utensils. |
| 08. | *Haladi Batā* | Pasting of termeric. |
| 09. | *Jhuntā Majā* | Cleaning the ankle chain. |
| 10. | Gadhuā | Bathing |
| 11. | *Mathā Jhadā* | Shaking of water from the hair with a towel. |
| 12. | *Shintā Fadā* | Parting the hair with a comb. |
| 13. | *Sindur Pindhā* | Puting a vermilion mark on the forehead. |
| 14. | *Udhuni chhatā* | Throwing the chaddar round the upper part of the body. |
| 15. | *Dhāna Kutā* | Paddy husking. |
| 16. | *Dhāna pachhudā* | Winnowing the rice. |
| 17. | *Baga Tabakā* | The walk of a heron. |

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|---|---|---|
| 18. | *Baga MāchhaDharā* | Catching of fish by a heron. |
| 19. | *BagaPanikhā* | Drinking of water by a heron. |
| 20. | *ChingidiChhitkā* | The spring of a prawn. |
| 21. | *Seula Dān* | The leap of a seula fish. |
| 22. | *Hanumān Pānikhā* | drinking water by a langur. |
| 23. | *Mārkad chiti* | The spring of a monkey. |
| 24. | *Harina Dān* | The leap of a deer. |
| 25. | *Chheli Dān* | The spring of a goat. |
| 26. | *Ghodā Dumukā* | Galloping of a horse. |
| 27. | *Khandā Hanā* | striking with a sword. |
| 28. | *Bāgha Dumukā* | galloping of a tiger. |
| 29. | *Habsā* | Heaving of the body. |
| 30 | *Chhalkā* | Gliding accompanies Lahara Tabaka |
| 31. | *Batā Chirā* | Splitting a bamboo. |
| 32. | *Chincharā* | Swinging accompanies moda Tabaka. |
| 33. | *Antā Modā* | Twisting the lower abdomen. |
| 34. | *Kantā Katā* | Chopping thorny bush. |
| 35. | *Kantā Nikā* | Clearing out the thorn. |
| 36. | *Uskā Jankā* | Leap and crouch.. |

The utility of the uphulis is that those in one sense constitue the alphabets of Chhow and thus a few of them held together by the relevant *Tabaka* go to constitute a *Bhangi* of which there are a large number depending on the *bhava* and the *rasa* and based primarily on

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the *uphulis.* New *bhangis* can be and are being invented. It will be observed that the *uphulis* are taken from characterstic movements of men, women, animals and birds but no attempt is made to reproduce the axact movement or action. What is attempted is a particular stylised movement as representing the essence. Its charm is mastered for use as and when necessary for expressing a *bhaba* or a rasa. Unlike photography no attempt is or can be made reproducing the identical action or movement. There must be a difference between an animal and an artist. From one point of view the uphulis are the basic building material of the Chhow in almost the same sense as bricks are to a building. These are largely self explanatory as the names indicated.

The training and practice sessions are for both the categories of the musicians, wind and percussion. Quite a few at the outset do not acquire the minimum fluency and expertise and have to be given a long and ardous practice under the watchful supervision of personnel fully trained in the particular instrument. After the requisite standard in individual skill had been achieved they are given further training to perform as groups during which they are given extensive practice in properly accompanying the dance movements and vocal music in all the *talas* and *ragas* i.e. Jhumur, Kirtan, Hindustani, Odissi, Adivasi & others. And lest they get rusty, the musicians are made to practice as much during the period of training and preparation as the dancers, if necessary, outside the time-table set for dance rehearsals.

**Kitā**

Except for the omnibus term *Kita* which to the initial imply 'boxing up' or cataloguing a set of *bhangis* for one particular theme, the general reader would sense the connotation of this term if he recalls the function of musical notations (*sargam*) to the different *ragas* and *Raginis.* It is obvious that different *bhangis* are selected to illustrate the themes of the different numbers, the selection depending on the varied motifs or elements for the generation of an appropriate *rasa.* The word *Kita* incidentaly is taken from the terminology relating to land, meaning a plot of land made distinct by earth-ridges on all the sides.

These foregoing nomenclature are not uniform. It should always be remembered that there was no authoritative book as such, or any written record or accepted literature on the subject. Also it had been a developing one and has not been choreographed and immutably fixed by custom. The *Ostads* labouring under stresses of competitive creative effort, had brought those into being and presented them

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after due polish. It is thus only to be expected that the idioms would not be identical. The wonder is that the differences are negligible, as would be apparent if the reader cares to cross-check the details, the minor difference between two *Sahis* being 1.*Duba Tabaka*, 2.*Thamaka*, 3.*Panda Hana*, 4.*Bagha Dian*. There are minor differences between two *Sahis* regarding numbers and names of some *Tabaks* and *Uphulis*. Because if one *Sahi* does not eccept a name, it none the less, accepts the concept and it makes its appearances in *bhangi* and other postures common to all. Greater stress is placed on the foot work of a male dancer than of a female who makes more use of hands. The male movements are obviously more vigorous and those of the female roles are more soft and feminine. In all steps and all actions in all the dances for male as well as for female roles, the action begins with the right foot and almost always the toes point downward.

These differences, though minor, unavoidably crept into Chhow in the past, as it must happen when it is developing and taking shape particularly under the princely patronage. Moreover when highly knowledgeable teachers with their own working method and talent were evolving the art, it would be idle to look for complete unanimity of views and opinions. The time is now oportune for the details of *chouk, uphulis, tabakas, bhangis*, steps and stances to be reduced to common accepted system. This can be achieved only if the *Ostads* and the old artists of both parties sit together in a spirit of co-operation of give and take, put their signatures on uniform system which thereafter, should be published as a written record under the aegis of the Sangeet Nataka Akademi, thereby giving the art its permanent form.

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CHAPTER SIX

# COMPOSITION OF DANCES

The raison d' etra of dance is the creation of *rasa,* i.e., the inducement of an anticipated mental and emotional state in the viewer. Where there is no *rasa* obviously that art is dead, as *rasa* breathes life into any art. In traditional India, the aim of all artistic exposition, like the *Jatra* dances and celebrations, is to enhance religious fervour in the people by enacting the *Leela* of the gods and goddesses. The cosmic sports, passions and allied activities, the different moods, feelings and nuances of the soul are stirred and aroused by depicting such cosmic passions, the *Leela* of the Gods, and this is *rasa* of which there are nine shades as has been mentioned earlieer.

A few stanzas (in translation) of some songs are quoted below to illustrate the foregoing points. The songs are popular to the extent of being near the ground and they convey depth and imagery which satisfy a stern critic. Also of interest is the language of the songs, which is a kind of language prevalent in the area, viz, Oriya, Bengali and Hindi spoken by the Adivasis and others. The tune, which is *Jhumur,* is the pronounced folk tune specialised in protraying the Radha-Krishna theme in the region. It need hardly be mentioned that the *Jhumur* is free from conventions and constraints of the classical music and as such provides an artist with a measure of freedom to develop his theme. This freedom also goes a long way to make the theme emotionally satisfying to the mass-audience. The songs are :

(1) On the banks of flowing Jamuna from a flower bedecked bower buzzing with busy bees Murari trills the seductive plaintively calling for Radha. And Radha rushes to meet him. Her gait more dazzling than a burst of lightening, her mind agitated, her upper garment *(anchal)* slipping off her bust. It was a dark stormy night of *Bhadra* to begin with, and secondly a princess, alone unprotected, often she finds her way illuminated with flashes of lightening.

(2) Oh do not pull a gloomy face. Oh thou whose face outshines the autumn moon to shame, Oh thou lotus face whose smile is sweeter than the *kunda* and *kāsa* flower sit not in gloom with your hands supporting the cheek and hasten to adorn my arm. I pray thee so as not to kill my happiness, as I am lovelorn pierced through and through with shaft of Cupid.

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(3) Oh *sephāli* (a sweet scented flower which blosoms at night and falls to the ground in the morning) spread thy floral train *(anchal)* in autumn morn. Thou ginglest thine ankle bells and the sacred offering in thy hands. Bathed in the dew of night whose vigil are you keeping ? And the cool of the soft night breeze and thine eyes gently droop to a doze. Thou weave thy garland of victory in thy own metre and suffuse the tray with thy offerings of thy sweet aroma repeatedly beckoning the beloved (the morning star) with the first streak of the sun.

(4) Oh Birdie (*mainā*), repeat all the varied notes-the call of the flamingo *(sārasa)* on the river bank and the cry of the peacock in the forest. And I am beset with the continuous problem of how best to appear before the beloved. And how I wish I got the price of a rupee for each word trilled by you.

While finalising a theme not noly care is taken to ensure that the appropriate music and actions are carefully built up but also equal care is taken to ensure that completion of a theme is reduced to a minimum even to the extent of cutting out almost all the frills with the possible exception of a few appropriate topical comic touches here and there. The aim of this drastic simplification is to make certain that the story builds itself up to the climax in a series of graduated and easily discernable movements in order that it becomes easy to the performing personnel to master the details during training and for error-free presentation during the performance. The themes lend the strength to such a treatment because there is little or no tragedy, and that the themes, though expressive of profound emotions, are simple in conception.

With these priliminary remarks we shall proceed to demonstrate anatomy of a few celeberated dances.

To begin with, we shall discuss a popular theme from the Mahabharata, the story of *Kirāta-Arjuna*. The story goes that Arjuna was making hard and robust penance in the Himalayas for obtaining a boon from Land Mahadeva– the *Pāsupata*, the mythical weapon of supernatural strength. Mahadeva was sufficiently moved by his penance and he made up his mind to appear before Arjuna accompanied by his consort, in the guise of a hunter (*Kirāta*) with his wife and his attendants, in order to ascertain if Arjuna had the ability to posses and use such a powerful weapon. A wild boar was arranged to be let loose be-

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fore Arjuna whom he killed. The hunter began to dispute the ownership of the carcass claiming that his and not Arjuna's arrow had killed it. From words it came to a battle royal, and to his utter astonishment Arjuna found that his arrows were not producing the desired effect whatsoever on the hunter. His quiver having gone empty, he used his famous bow, *Gāndiba* as a club, but even that could produce no effect. The truth then dawned on him, and he began praying to Shiva who then revealed his identity (in form of Shiva) and conferred the *Pasupata* on Arjuna after having restored all his weapons to him.

The break of the story is so arranged that the artistic necessity of preserving the unity of action is fully maintained and finale is built up effortlessly. The dance opens with Arjuna's penance in the Himalayas, followed by the appearance of Shiva, his consort, and followers, from one side of the arena, The boar is skilfully inducted and then the flight of both the arrows is carefully depicted. Then followed the battle for the ownership of the carcass with the astonished Arjuna, belatedly realising the probable explanation, followed by his dance of worship which pleased the object of his meditation. Thus is built up the climax when Shiva dances in the *Mahadeva Tala* before conferring the weapon, the gift of the weapon signaling the close of the dance.

It may be pointed out that in selecting the theme care is taken to blend the classical elements, with those of the Adivasis in the decor, settings, ornaments as well as in the music.

The illustration is now shifted to the creation of Kalidas - T*he Abhisapta* (the Cursed) taken from *Vikramorbashi*. The story. sometimes named *Laxmi Swayambara* opens with the heavenly dance. Urbashi was being captured and kept in confinement by the demons while returning from *Kuberpuri*. Thereafter King Pururava rescues her and her female attendants, being attracted to the place by her lamentations. And both the King and Urbashi felt attracted towards each other, but they went on their respective ways. The scene now shifts to the events in the heaven where the sage Bharata, now getting ready to stage the drama *Laxmi Swayambar* before a distinguished audience of gods, and some celebrated mortals including King Pururava, who had been invited. Urbasi had been given the leading role of *Laxmi*. She had been a little agitated at the sight of King Pururava and at a critical place she blurted out Pururava in place of Purusottam, thereby making a fatal flaw in the performance which chagrined the Saint to no end, as he was the recognised expert in the realm of dance, drama and music. The angry Saint then pronounced a curse on her that she was to come to the earth in human form. To soften the curse Indra rules that she was to remain on earth with Pururava till she bore him a son.

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The dance opens with the capture of the damsels and their lamentations. The next stage is the arrival of Pururava, his act of rescue, and the awakening of first love between the King and the heavenly dancer, The scene then shifts to heaven where the stage has been set by Saint Bharat for staging his play *Laxmi Swayambar.* Then follows the fatal *fauxpas,* followed by Bharat's curse, and the moderation enjoined by Indra. The climax is obviously in the union of King Pururava and Urbashi.

The third in the list of illustrations is the celebrated *Rāsa Leelā.* The *Maha Rasa Leela* is the most profound of the *leelas* of Sri Krishna. It was enunciated by Vysasdeva for the enlightenment of mankind and was narrated by Sukadeva to King Parikhita. At the age of eight Sri Krishna on the bank of Jamuna, through his *māyā* had enacted dalliance with 16000 milk-maids (*Gopis*) on the last night during the bright fortnight of the month of Kartika. The traditional mode of beautiful and well-dressed girls dancing in a circle holding each other's hands with Shri Krishna in the middle is called the *Rāsa.* It symbolised the movement of the universe round the Lord who is the centre of all things. According to Mrinalini Sarabhai, this dance in Warrangal is called *Hallisaka,* described as being a dance by one man surrounded by many women in a circular formation depicting universe around the person of the Lord. Any act or object which evokes the feeling of love in human breast is called *rasa* and this *Leela* evokes the best and the purest of all the *rasas,* the *Sringara Rasa.* As the story is well known, it was on these fragrant moonlight of autumn nights that the Lord using his Yogic powers (*māyā)* enslaved the hearts of the maidens of Vraja with his *Mohan Vanshi* to such an extent that breaking through all prohibitions and defying all oppositions they had flocked to him on the banks of Jamuna. His magic flute had moved and enslaved all the objects calling on all to come and merge in him.

The dance opens with song, and Shri Krishna dancing and playing the flute. It is followed by the entrance of Radha into the bower (*kunja*) accompanied by the Gopa maidens all singing as well as dancing to the seductive flute of the Lord. Thereafter enters the devotee Narada. Shri Krishna using his maya concealed all the *Gopis* and when Narada looked he saw only Radha and Krishna everywhere. The gods from above showered flowers. After Narada's enraptured departure, Krishna caused the reappearance of all the *Gopis* and the finale *Natki* depicts the dance of all, Krishna Radha and the *Gopis,* in reunion each *Gopi* feeling that she was dancing with the beloved Lord.

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We will begin the illustration with a resume of Ādi-Nātya, the original Indian mythological drama. For the enlightenment of the orders not entitled to the study of the Vedas, Brahma created the fifth Veda, the Natya-Veda, culling elements from each of the four Vedas and entrusted saint Bharata who has acquired mastery in that art to stage a play. Just before this the churning of the ocean had taken place and it was decided to dramatise and stage this episode at the Rangabhumi of the heaven where the Devas and the Ausuras assembled in response to a general invitation.

The action opens with Brahma and the Devas entering the arena and dance the prelude. This is followed by the dancing entrance of the Asuras, thus completing the number of invitees. This followed by the entrance of Bharata who after the salutation proceeds to demonstrate the 108 *Karans* of the art of dancing. Thereafter his boy and girl disciples begin to enact the *Samudra Manthan* dance drama. The Asuras took umbrage at staging a theme derogatory to them and through their *maya* made all the dancers lose their consciousness and thus stopped the performance. Indra realising the *maya* of Asuras chased them away with a flag staff and planted it on the stage in order to counteract all the *maya* and evil eyes, and from that incident there arose the instance of planting a pole before undertaking any important function in order to ward off all evil designs. It is called the *Jarjara* ceremony which is still observed on the eve of the Chhow. Brahma, to continue the narrative, using the powers of his *mantras* brought the dancers back to consciousness and the dance with all its verve continued and was also brought to a close as planned.

Of the 108 Karans mentioned before, generally 24, and a few more, are used in the Chhow and are technically called the *Uphulis*, each of them a pantomime of the daily domestic work of a household, or the actions of birds and animals. Incidentally this dance was composed and presented at the Chhow performances in 1940.

Leaving the austere classical theme, we now present a folk-theme tinged with Puranic overtones. This dance opens with Devajani, Sarmistha and their maid-attendants disporting in water. Then as a result of a misunderstanding centering on their respective clothes there was a savage quarrel between them, as a result of which Sarmistha pushed Devajani into a disused well. Thus ends the first phase. The second phase opens with King Jajati who is out hunting accompanied by his Adivasi hunters and attendants coming upon the well in quest of drinking water. On hearing the cry issuing from the well, he looked into

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it and found a maiden inside. He rescued her. In the third and the last phase Devajani reveals her identity with a brief song and appropriate dance. The King and Devjani then make their exit, leaving the King's Adivasi hunters to dance with joy and pleasure.

The hunters are dressed in Adivasi clothes and their dances as well as the music are in Adivasi steps and tunes, one of which incidentally was obtained from the ex-state of Bastar, in Madhya Pradesh.

The next is *Tamudia Krishna*, one of the best themes in the Chhow as mentioned earlier- a Vaishnab theme tinged with tribal music. The action opens with Krishna and his cowherd play-mates dancing towards Kadamba tree on the bank of the Jamuna, around which they concealed themselves. This is followed by Radha carrying a golden pitcher and accompanied by her maidens all cleaning their ankle chains. They then lifted their pitchers but Radha found it a trifle heavy for her to lift. The maidens ignored the truth and continued dancing. Krishna then breaks the pitcher of Radha pelting a stone. Radha's clothes become wet and cling to her shapely torso. The friends (*Sakhis*) looked around for the offender and having spotted Krishna winked at Radha to indicate Krishna's presence. Then Krishna and his mates breaking the cover aproached Radha and her group dancing. Radha and her group similarly dance their way towards the approaching Krishna. And finally keeping Radha in the middle the maids form a circle and attempt to escort her to Krishna. Radha breaks lose from the circle in pretence and her dance on this occasion is the highlight of the theme. Radha and Krishna approach each other. She feigning reluctance gives away. She surrenders and they embrace and kiss, and all present dance with joy and pleasure. As this theme is not quite self-explanatory the author takes the liberty of commenting that the whole episode on the bank of the Jamuna is an allegorical endeavour to indicate that salvation of the soul is possible only through an all ambracing love and desire of union with the Creator, as was demonstrated by Radha on the bank of the Jamuna. Jamuna allegorically speaking, represents the volume of love, and the soul can meet his maker only through boundless love, like the tidal flow of the Jamuna flooding upstream.

The foregoing resume of the theme is only illustrative and not exhaustive as there are over 5 scores of such themes. It needs to be appreciated that a great deal of hard, intelligent and dedicated collective labour of the Gurus (*Ostads*), musicians, dancers and others go to perfect the exact performance, complete in all the details of unity of the theme and practice relased to performance as well as dress, music, choreography. Indeed, each dance is a tribute to the energy and dedi-

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cation of the team from which it is not possible to single out any one for any special mention.

**The Presentation**

The following details largely relate to the period when the Maharaja was not only the patron of the Chhow, but in a very real sense the lif ; and soul of it.

The venue of the dance was the spacious second court-yard of the palace. A few days prior to the performance, representatives of each *Sahi* in consultation with the *Panjika* and *Pujak*, select an auspicious day, on which after a brief religious ceremony a pole with a red flag atop (to ward off evil influence) is erected. Thereafter a gate for each *Sahi* is put up. This gate is really a raised platform with one side open facing the dance arena and it is covered by an arrangement resembling a stage front complete with drop scenes. It is called a gate because the dance is not performed on the platform but on the open air arena in front, which is specially prepared with a profuse quantify of soft earth carefully packed, the gate being the entrance and exit for the dancers. The audience sit or stand all round the arena in serial ranks and the women are sent to the balconies of the first and the second floor of the palace. No one is barred from witnessing the dance and all are welcome, yet, no invitations (except to the members of the Raj family and few brother-rulers) are issued and no special arrangement is (or can be) made for any VIP, barring about a dozen. The seats/ stands/ places are allotted on the first come first serve principle. The gathering assumes an impressive aspect and gives the impression of a packed 3 tiered stadium. It would not be an exaggeration to put the number around 10/12 thousands, all sexes, all ages, all classes as well as from distant outlying places.

On the first night of the dance, falling generally on the 28th day of the Chaitra, worship is offered to Vairava in the two shrines, one for each *Sahi.* This of course is a duplication of the first such *puja* offered on the eve of the training at the *Akhara* and the *Nada Bandha* ceremony. It is again gone through for the participants to keep the usual fast and follow the requirments as laid down in this connection.

During after-noon Ambika and Kichakeswari are worshipped with appropriate music. Thereafter loose earth brough from the Shrine of Vairava is sprinkled over the arena, as is done on the first day of training on the *Akhara* floor, after which the artists walk across the arena in order that they get familarised with the arena. This is known as the *Āshar Madā*- treading the arena or *Ashar.* The artists then adjourn to the green-room to prepare for the performance.

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As the evening advances, the beginning of the dances is announced by two successive rolls of drum *(Nāgarā)* at an interval of about one hour. Then the show begins at the appointed time with the Maharaja in his capacity as the umpire, and others in position. The beginning is heralded by a long buzz on the large drum *Dhumusa* followed by *Dhumal* which is a benedictory instrumental music. This is followed by *Jorden* which is a massed display in which all instruments are used and which begins in a slow tempo rising to a crescendo. The *Rang baja* follows the *Jorden.* Then a duet dance is produced by the appearance of the clown like characters (now discontinued). There were the *Kaji-Paji* who regale the audience dancing with comic movements and gyrations, singing rather obscene songs and sometimes giving a preview of the dances to follow. This discontinunance was probably in the interest of economy of time, or was dropped because of the non-Hindu names. But be it what it may, the decision was unfortunate, as its traditional and ritualistic significance was not properly appreciated, because in a way this can be compared with Laba Kusa pair in the *Rama Leela* or Sreedam and Sudam pair in *Krishan Leela* or Nandi and Vrungi pair in *Shiva Jatra*, or even the chorus as in the classical Athenian stage.

There is yet another aspect to consider. The Chaitra Parva celebration in the distant past had greatly been influenced by Bhuddhism as had been mentioned earlier. This is evident from a perusal of *Dharma Purana* which was composed by Ramai Pandit. Under the Chapter. "The Indignation of Niranjan" (*Niranjan's Rushamā*) we read that the devotees of *Dharama Devata* oppressed by the Hindus, approached Dharma for protection. Dharma appeared in an incarnation of a Jabana (*Dharama Hailā Jabanarupi)* and all the Gods marched with him in Muslim uniforms and masks. Brahma as Mahammad, Vishnu as Paigambar and Shiva assumed the role of *Adampha*, and what is more relevent to purpose, Ganesh assumed the role of Gazi and Kartika that of Kazi. In this fashion Narada, Chandra, Surya, Laxmi and the rest of the Hindu gods and goddesses were assigned the roles of either Muslim soldiers or musicians and the whole host marched against the oppressive Brahmins at Jajpur, destroyed the temples, killed the Hindus and thus saved the followers of *Dharma Devata*. It may be noted that the author of *Dharam Purana* belongs to the Dom community, and members of this community provide the musicians for the Chhow, and members of the so called upper castes freely mingle with them, and even some of them play the drum apparently against the caste rules. In course of further evolution this celebration had shed its Buddhistic aspects and has become a Shaiva ceremony, but had been unable to dispense with all the

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Buddhistic trappings, and the Kaji-Pazi, or rather Kaji-Gazi representing Ganesh and Kartika was retained. There was nothing unusual in such a synthesis when under the impact of Islam, the institution of Satyapir had been accepted by both the communities. The exclusion of the Kazi-Pazi pair from the modern Chhow is, it is repeated, an avoidable mutilation of a traditional Shiva ritual.

More to our purpose, in the *Danda Nata* which is the Chhow or most akin to it than other celebrations, the appearance of Kotwal, Fakir and other characters in Muslim clothes make their respective appearances without exciting any comment.

We shall say a few words about each of the preliminary musical displays which precede the actual dance.

To take the *Gudu-Gudi* first. This has often been rendered into English as a long buzz. This buzz is produced by striking the big drums *Dhumusas* with two sticks and the result is a deep buzz and sonorous note which never fails to send vibration in the body and minds of all those present or even those nearby. This buzz has the symbolical allusion to creation or the reminiscent of the Vedic *OM*.

This big drum is the Vedic *Dundhuvi.* The wooden frame of the *Dhumsa* is obtained by digging into one side of the length of the Palmyra (*Vanaspati*) trunk on whcih a piece of buffalo hide is stretched. This wood is chosen because of its pure note which may not be produced by its modern substitute steel frame. This *Dhumasa* has a hoary history which goes back to Vedic sacrifice. It is also a most important instrument of the Adivasis during their special functions such as wedding dances, and religious celebrations etc.

This buzz is not only the symbolic prelude to creation, but also the prelude to the actual dance, and is followed by *Dhumal,* a short musical piece in the nature of salutation to the presiding deity.

The Dhumal music is followed by *Jordan* which may be rendered as the concert, which is a massed display of all the instruments beginning on a low *Vilambita laya* rising gradually to the *M[illegible]aya* (medium) and *Druta* (fast) *laya*.

Jordan in Chhow is similar to *Joda*, a technical concept (*bol*) which is resorted to for transition from the slow to the fast tempo and can be accomplished easily by string instruments playing *Dā, Dā, or Dārā Dārā* without too many *tāns* and in Chhow music, the corresponding *bols Dā Dhendā Dā Dhandā* played on the percussions and wind instruments and *Jhan Jhan Jhan,* the *Kirtan* music, on the *Mridanga*.

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After the *Dhumal* and heralding, the actual performance is the *Ranga Bājā*. This is by far the most interesting. It is the worship of *Ranga Devata* which as the expression indicates is the preliminary cermony just prior (*Purva)* to any performance on a stage. Tradition ascribes the *Ranga Baja* to Shiva who had ordained it at the staging of the *Samudra Manthan* by Sage Bharat at Indrapuri, in order to ward off evil eyes and spirits. Basically it is of propitiatory nature invoking the blessings and good wishes of gods, the King, the Brahmins and cows, poets and Gurus as well as all elders. It would be noticed that it is a clever and artistic device in order to disarm hostile criticism even before the beginning of the performance, by establishing an obvious rapport and empathy between the artists on the one hand and the audience on the other. The tradition is that, though worship and reverence had already been performed for the stage and the arena *(Akhada Madā)*, and the playing of the benedictory musical piece, the *Dhumal*, Shri Gourang is invoked by the Ranga, playing a *Kirtan* tune and the usual *Kirtan tal* (*Choutal)* by both the *Sahis*. This opening piece is a must and never varies although there are quite a few strands of *Ranga* music. There is a further implication. *Ranga* is obviously related to the word *Raga* (musical Rāga) or *Ranja* which produces pleasure, Raga (passion) or redness (colour). It is not ordinarily known that during the Vedic Brahman era *Varna*, the Sanskrit word for colour, was also used to describe or denote a tune or a song and that the word meaning description *(Barnana)* is derived from the word *Barna*, Further in ancient Egypt, according to Mrs, Anne Besant, the scriptures were at one time compiled in colour (*Varna*) only and not in Hieroglyphics (*Building of the Cosmos*, P/76).

Then again *Ranga* in its more than one shade or meaning is resorted to generate a receptive mood, i.e, the mood of devotion in addition to the dances, to be performed immediately after *Ranga.* According to the manuals of classical music, *Ranga,* in the sense of colour, is associated with each of the seven notes from *Sā* to *Ni,* viz, the *Raudra Rasa* and its dominant (*Vadi)* note. *Sa* is associated with Red, a warm colour, and the *Sringara Rasa* with its dominant (*Vadi*) note; *Pā* with *Shyāma* or blue, a cool colour and so on.

In addition, this provides an opening to all musicians, wind and percussion, to demonstrate their virtuosity by elaborating on all the intricate nuances of a tune or *tala* and such efforts generate a tense expectant mood as these complex presentations are of a competitive nature between the two *Sahis* exhibiting deep skills in *Laya*, and *Tala* in all its aspects (*Laghu, Guru, Pluta,) Sam, Visam, Fank, Theka, Paran, Tukra, Tihai* and the rest. The emphasis on this aspect from the point of

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view of the musician's timing *(tala)* is the very life or rather heart-beat of a dance. Even an eye-lash advantage held by one, or his counterpart, would mean all the difference between winning or losing a competition. No wonder then, that the musicians, particularly dancers, while demonstrating their art and technique, work themselves almost into a frenzy after casting derisive looks and gestures at the opponent. And it follows that the maestros irrespective of their social status are given the regard and respect of a Guru, as also those who take an integral part in composing new themes and new *talas*, such as the solo piece *Dewari Panda* composed by late Dwari Kuanr, the head drummer of the *Uttar Sahi.*

We shall now preceed to describe the actual dance. But before dipping into the intricate details its characteristics should be indicated. The dance has no programme or card of events as such. The audience has to disern the name or meaning or implication of a particular dance as it unfolds. Further, this dance or its alter ego, the *Danda Nata* (or the masked dances of Tibet or Bhutan) were originally dumb performances, i.e., without any vocal accompaniment, Consequently reliance is placed on costumes, facial expressions, postures, gestures and similar aids or keys to facilitate its appreciation.

The dances are divided into phases. Each dance should have a beginning, middle and end, and hence it begins with a preview or *Purbāvāsh.* The curtain rises over all the dances arranged on the platform in full and complete costume, each dancer in the pose characteristic of the role he is to portray, i.e., Krishna of the seductive flute in his charateristic stance, the warrior blandishing his weapon, or the slumbering Kumbhakarna prior to his fatal awakening. It helps the audience to form a mental picture of the fare to follow. It may be mentioned that as a concession to modernity occasional songs have now been introduced in order to elucidate a suitable theme. This phase is analogous to the *Alāp* or *Asthāi* of classical music or to *prastara* in Vedic *Shāma Gan.*

After this preview the dancers step down on the [illegible]en arena and begin unfolding and elaborating the theme. This is known as the *Bada Tala.* It is in this phase that reliance is placed on intricate *talas* or songs, complete with all the tilts and other embellishments that music can provide. This may be equated to the *Sanchari* phase in classical music or to the *udgritha* of the *Sam Gan.*

At the end of this main phase when the theme had fully been presented in all its facets, comes the finale, the *Nātki,* when the tempo gradually rising to *Druta,* the dancer/dancers taking part in the dance in

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joyous abandon before bringing the theme to a close. The music appropriately muted to suit the *Namita Gamak* thus creates an abiding rapport between the dancers and the assembled public.

The final detail in each dance-number being equivalent to the participants 'taking the curtain' when the dancers line up before the Maharaja who often presents gifts, which include costly items such as Banarasi brokades, gold ornaments and the like to the star-artists. This practice was prevalent during the time of Shri Ram Chandra Bhanj, but was discontinued by Shri Pratap Chandra Bhanj.

It may be mentioned here that the absence of tragedy or tragic situation is the chief characteristic of the Chhow dance and this is illustrated in the *Natki*, the finale, heralding a happy ending. This *Natki* is in line with the Vedic tradition. In the Saman music it is called the *Nidhana*, i.e., the closing chorus, in which all present take part. In classical music this end-performance is known as the *Abhog*, as also the *jamal* in *Kirtan* and *Natki* in Jhumur songs, sung in quicker tempo, all analogous to this *Natki* of the Chhow.

This is not indeed the end of the story. At the end all the members of the Chhow, of both the *Sàhis*, dancers, musicians, *Ostads* and the rest relax forgetting their erstwhile rivalry, dance joyously and go round from the arena dancing their way to visit people in a group with musical accompaniment, and clad in the dance costumes, the whole of the following day, and are affectionately entertained to cold drinks and feasts at the houses of the wealthy sympathisers. In some areas, notably in Keonjhar, the corresponding practice is to take out a procession of all the members of the dance groups, dragging a decorated chariot all the way, probably a relic of the Buddhist practice. This procession, dance and music, are common to the institution of the *Bhaktas* all over the region, in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, this aspect being technically known in the Chhow parlance as the *Haribol*, significantly like the *Nagar Kirtan* of the *Vaishnavas*.

The *Natki*, it may be mentioned, is an artistic tour de force incorporating all the skills of stagecraft and the visual art, in addition to the skilful control of instrumental and vocal music with the mounting tempo, and the distance between the hero and the heroine or between the groups where the hero-heroine motif has been eliminated, gets imperceptively shortened. All the members participate in order to heighten the illusion of a full arena- a psychologically pleasant feeling, which some modern producers are attempting to emulate along with

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the themes in which the traditional hero and the heroine are conspicuous by their absence, a device hit upon by the Chhow Ostads decades ago. Even the *Natki* in a solo number is so designed that the single individual manages to dominate entire arena so that the apparent 'nakedness' of the arena is not noticed as in the *Dandi, Ramsoka, Nataraja* and other solo dances. Also notice has to be taken of the fact that unlike a stage-auditorium, an open-air arena permits viewers to be placed on the right and the left of the dancers, in addition to the front, and it is necessary to ensure that those on the sides enjoy the dance as fully as possible. To that end, the choreography of each dance has been ingenuously manipulated in order to ensure that the performers face their right and left while turning and twisting in such a way that the breach of the usual 'Law of Frontality' is not noticed, and this fact is by no means an easy achievement.

Further, during the *Natki* of a love theme, the approach of the lovers towards each other, the man laying his hand on the shoulder of his beloved, sliding it round her waist, the embrace and the stylised kiss, along with the coy but appropriate reaction of the girl, are fully demonstrated, but with such quickness that any one would miss those enjoyable details unless he is watching the performance intently, specially in the *Tamudia Krishna*, a theme mentioned earlier, and which seems to stay 'green' even after all the decades of exhibition in Delhi, Bombay and other far away centres.

We now come to the end of the chapter on Composition and Presentation of the dance where we have attemped to show elements of dance form and musical accompaniments, which have been culled from the Vedic traditions, and from the tenents of the classical dance and music as well as from *Vaishnava* tradition. But finally it should be remembered that in orgin it is largely folk dance, danced by simple men of tribal community for their own entertainment or religious celebration.

In conclusion it may be said that all the developments chronicled in the foregoing accounts have come about during the modern period largely because of the princely patronage of this art, which made it possible for experts in dance, music and allied arts, to come together and embelish this with its modern, highly sophisticated form.

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The popular dance director Shri Vinod Chopra rightly observed ("Film Fare', March 1970, Special Issue) as follows :

> There are plenty of materials in our rich dances which can be exploited- colour and movement from the folk dances of the States and provinces, from the classical Schools of Kathak, Kathakali, Manipuri and Bharat Natyam, and also from the less known classical style like Chhow (Orissa).

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# Appendix-A

## RADHAMOHAN; A PROFILE

Radhamohan was born in the year 1912, at Beltol, a village near Pattamundai town in the district of Cuttack (now Kendrapara). His father late Govind Chandra Mohanty was serving as judicial - peskar under the Mayurbhanj State Government. As there was no schooling facility in the village, Govind Babu brought his six-year-old son to Baripada for giving him proper education. Later he decided to settle at Baripada permanently and brought other members of his family to that place. He however retained his ancestral house and landed property at his village and used to visit Beltol at regular intervals to look after the same.

Radhamohan after coming over to Baripada fell in love at the first sight with the beautiful sleepy little town which was then the capital of erstwhile Mayurbhanj State. His love for Baripada lasted till he breathed his last on 15.7.93. He had no fascination for his native village and became out and out a man of Baripada. Later he disposed of his landed interest at Beltol and snapped all ties with the village. After completing his school education at the Baripada High School, Radhamohan joined the Mayurbhanj State Service in early thirties by following the footprints of his father. Initially he worked in the Mayurbhanj Secretariat for some time and later was transferred to work as the judicial peskar of the Dewan and the Ruling Chief of the State, the position which he held till a popular Ministry was installed in Mayurbhanj in the year 1948 when he became the Personal Assistant to the Prime Minister of the State. After merger of the State with Orissa he came over to the judicial department from which he retired in due course on attaining the age of superannuation.

Radhamohan had the reputation as an honest, sincere and dutiful worker and was liked by his superiors. But he was not a careerist. He had many other love than his service career. He was an ardent fan of soccer game. He was deeply involved with the Baripada Town Club Football team which had earned reputation in the game in and outside Orissa under the able leadership of late Brajasundar Dash, a foot baller of National recognition. He himself believed in physical exercise to maintain good health and undertook the same which included long morning walks and a few yogic asans. He was a simple man with an amiable and balanced disposition. He was never perturbed or worried in whatever difficult situation came his way. He always kept himself calm and cool. He never talked ill of others or adversly criticised others, not even his worst adversary, even in mock and lighter vein.

Although Radhamohan had limited formal education he was a well-

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read man. He had deep interest in books relating to History, Philosophy, Arts and Culture. He was regularly borrowing books from the Jublee Library at Baripada which had a rich collection of rare books and used to keep late hours in the night to go through them. But his first love was the Chhow dance of Mayurbhanj which was being performed every year in mid-April at Baripada in connection with the celebration of the Chaitra-parva. He was attracted towards this mysterious and beautiful dance in the early thirties when after completing his school education he became a member of the organising committee of Uttarsahi Chhow. By that time the Chhow dance under the liberal patronage of late Maharaja Sri Pratap Chandra of Mayurbhanj had attained the climax of its glory and had become famous in and outside Mayurbhanj State. Radahamohan from the beginning of his association with Chhow dance tried to acquaint himself with the dance form with the help of knowledgeable Ostads (Gurus) of the dance. His studies in Indian classical music and dance helped him to understand the complex intricacies of the Chhow dance. He contributed a number of themes and composed dances for the Chhow with the help of Gurus and musicians. He also developed an interest to study the origin and growth of the Chhow dance in general and Mayurbhanj Chhow in particular. His prolonged and painstaking research on the subject for over 30 years is at the back of this book, which is a pioneering attempt in the field.

After merger of Mayurbhanj State with Orissa in the year 1949, the Chhow dance of Mayurbhanj suffered a period of eclipse being deprived of the royal patronage under which it thrived. At that time Radhamohan joined hands with a band of enthusiastic admirers of the dance led by late Bhabani Kumar Das and late Ramesh Chandra Mohapatra, and some devoted Gurus and star-performers of the dance, to keep it alive. Their efforts yielded result by attracting the attention of leaders like late Rajgopalachari, Pt. Neheru and Dr. H.K. Mahatab etc. and got them grants from the Central and State Governments, which made its existance possible. At the instance of the State Government, late R.C. Dash, the then I.G. of Police (who was the manager of Uttar Sahi Chhow during pre-merger days) organised the 'Mayurbhanj Chhow Nrutya Pratisthan' under the patronage of Sangeet Natak Academy, with the Collector of Mayurbhanj as its President. Radhamohan was taken as a member of the Executive Committee of the organisation and served it for a long time.

After the Independence the Government of India exhibited considerable interest about little known and obscure folk arts prevalent in different regions of the country with a view to protect them from annihilation for want of patronage under changed circumstances, and to develop them whereever necessary. At that time the question arose regarding origin of Chhow dance in Mayurbhanj. The leading persons associated with the Chhow dance had no definite idea about the subject

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due to a lack of proper study on the subject. Some of them claimed that Chhow dance was evolved from the recreational dance practiced by the Paikas (infantry soldiers) of Mayurbhanj during peace time and this dance form has developed on parallel lines with the Chhow dance of Sareikela. The Chhow dance at Baripada which is performed without mask has a distinct style of its own and is different from the style pursued in Sareikela. Radhamohan who had a deep study on the subject contradicted this view by saying that Chhow dance has originated from socio-religious back ground. It is a part of Chaitra Prava, a Saiva-festival, which is observed in Mayurbhanj and adjoining areas of Orissa, Bengal and Bihar. Chhow dance without the Chaitra Parva festival has no existence. The Chhow dance like any other dance form in India was born out of religious institutions and festivals and it is a mistake to say that it owes its origin to any other institution which is not religious in nature. He also stated that the Chhow dance in its present form has been borrowed from Sareikela only a hundred years ago and has undergone some changes in the style and form in an attempt to make it more attractive by the royal patrons. He has dealt with the subject in detail in this present book. His views, got immediate appreciation in knowledgeable circles, but did not get the approval of the leaders of Mayurbhanj Chhow dance, who thought, if the views of Radhamohan is accepted by the Government, it would belittle the glory of Mayurbhanj and may lead to reduction of Government patronage which the Mayurbhanj Chhow dance was enjoying. Though their apprehension had no basis, they successfully dissociated Radhamohan from the official Chhow organisation in order to prevent him to press his point in official forum. This has resulted in non-publication of this book which was completed in the year 1976 on the basis of research work of over three decades. Radhamohan was of the opinion that a faithful and true account of the original style and choreography of the dance should be kept in record and the music of Chhow to be reduced to recorded notations in order to preserve an ancient art form, otherwise it would be forgotten and mutilated further in the name of modernisation.

Although Radhamohan was dissociated from the official Chhow organisation of Baripada, he did not lose his interest and love for the dance form which had become a part of his life. Till his last days he used to think about Chhow, read about it and kept notes of facts which interested him. He was never short of time to discuss the subject with students, critics and research scholars of Chhow dance which included some foreign scholars also who used to visit him to clarify their doubts.

Radhamohan died on the morning of 15th July, 1993, after living a full and purposeful life. With him there came the end of an era of Mayurbhanj Chhow dance as almost all the old guards of the unique dance form had preceded him leaving a very few lamanting in old age and oblivion.

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# Appendix B

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# Appendix C

१. यमुना तटिनी निकुंज बिकसित यया प्रसून पुंज
गुंजरे अलि मातिया
सेयाए मुरारी बाजाए बाँशरी
राधा राधा ना धरिया।
चले याए गो राधा चले याए गो
दामिनी गति जिनिया ॥ १ ॥

एकेत भादर राति आँधारि
देुज एकाकिनी राजकुमारी
क्षणे क्षणे पय याए भुलिया।
संगेते मदन चलिल तखन
जिुलि आलोक जालिया।
चेल याए गो राधा
चलिल येन बिजुलि गति जिनिया ॥ २ ॥

*(Bengali, Page-57)*

२. निंद शरद इंदु लपन म्लान नकर रस सिंधु
कुंद काश जित मंद मधुर स्मित सुंदर मुख अरबिंदकु
गंड़रे नमंड़ तु पारि चांड़ें मो विनय आरे बंधुरे बचनकु शुणि
खंड़नारे सुख श्रेणी मंड़ मो कोल तरुणी
सुमनर कांड़ चांड़े तनु खंड़ करे पुंड़रिक दृशि शुण मो बाणी
निंदे शरद इंदु।

*(Oriya, Page-57)*

३. शेफालि तोमर आँचल खानि बिछाअ शरद प्राते
चरने चरने तोल रिनि झिनि अरघ बरन हाते
मृदल हिल्लोले अलसे पड़िले ढ़ले
ढ़लुढ़लु न्न पाते।
छंदे छंदे गाये तब जय माला
गंधेर अर्च्चनि भरे दाव डाला
अरुन किरने हाकिआ डाकिआ
एस एस बंधु प्रभोत।

*(Bengali, Page-58)*

४. मईना तु हरेक बोली
नदी किनारे सारस बोले
बनमे बोले मोर
निशिदिन शोच हाय सैयाँका मन मे
किसे देखाओं भेक्
हरेक बोलि एक एक रूपेया
भावं मे ला गो मोल।

*(Hindi, Page-57)*

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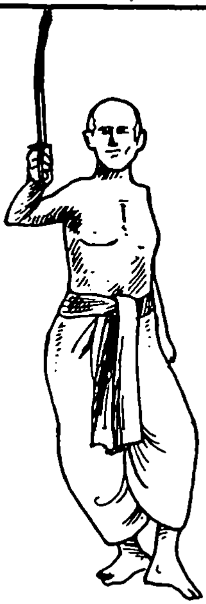
SADA TABAKA



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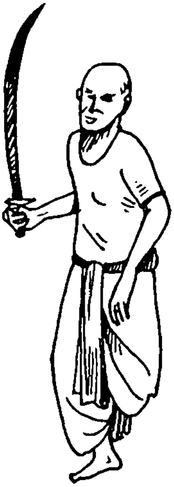

MUDA TABAKA

DHEU TABAKA

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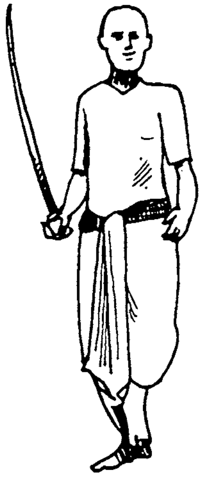
DUBA TABAKA



USKA TABAKA

KHANDA HANA UFULI (M)

KANTA KATA UFULI (M)

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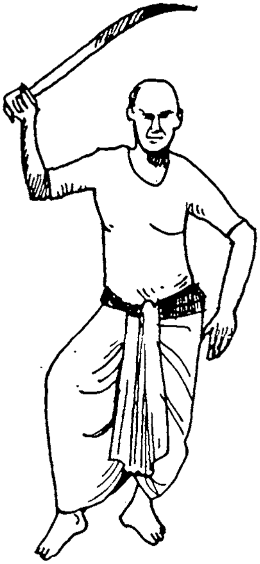
KANTA NIKA UFULI (M)

BAGA MACHA KHOJA UFULI (M)



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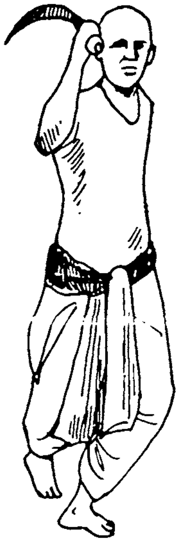

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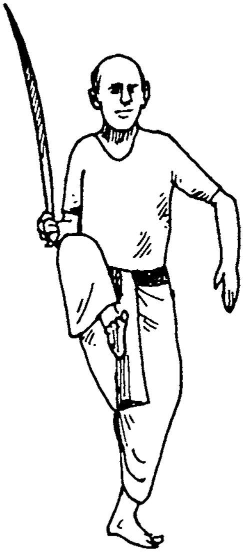
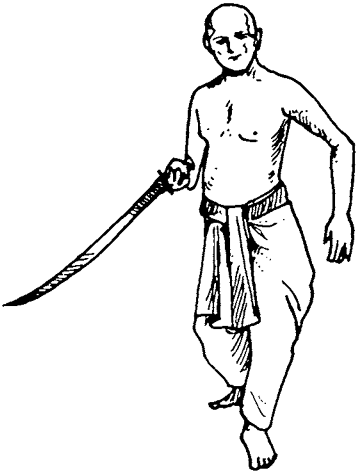
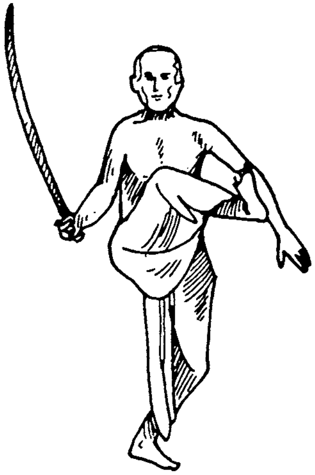


CHHADA DIYA UFULI (F)

USKA JANKA (M)



HANA UTHAN (M)



UDHANI CHHATA (F)

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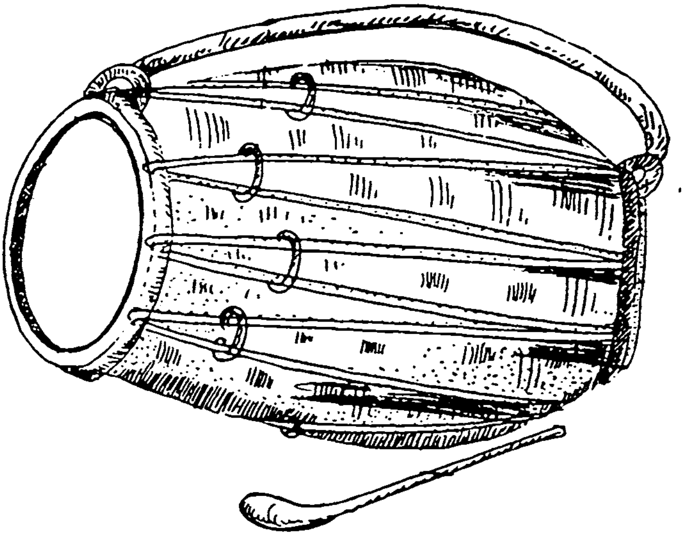

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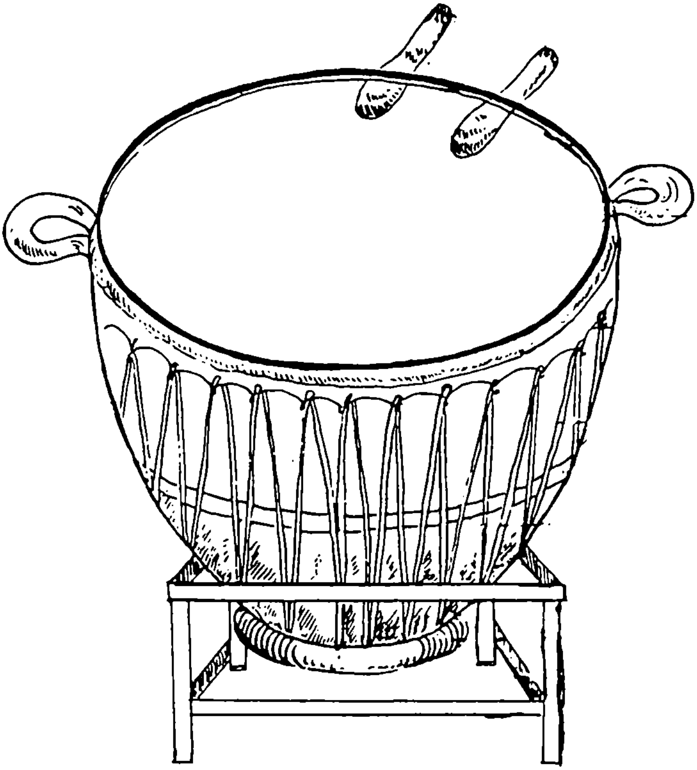

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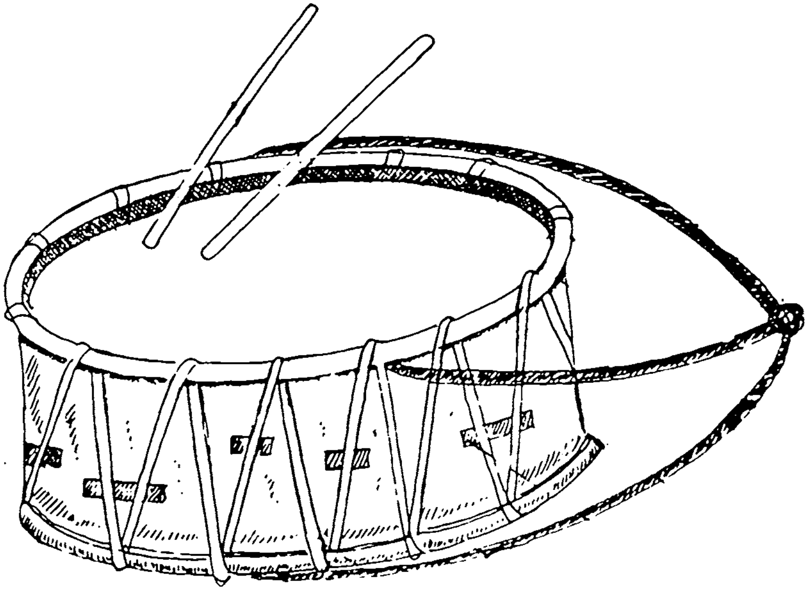

CHADCHADI

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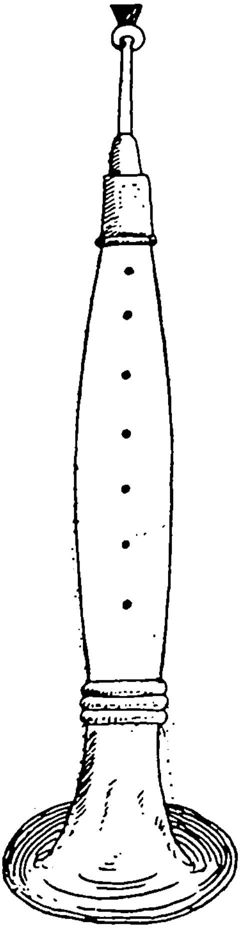

MAHURI

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